

ENCOUNTERING

ORCAS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY THOMAS KUHN

We are sailing between the diving areas of "Inglis Shoal" (Sea Mountain) and "Zero Fighter" when Stefan notices a giant tailfin about 200 metres from our boat.



Dorsal fins of two orcas near Cape Campbell.

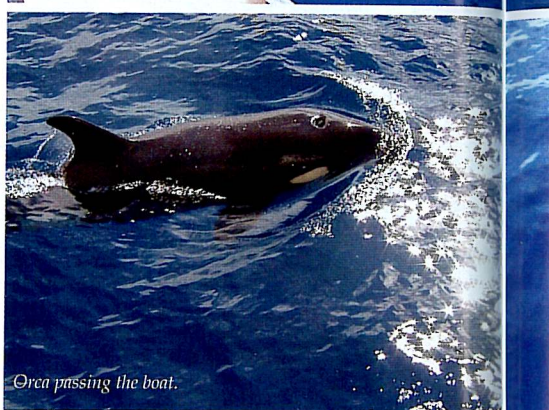
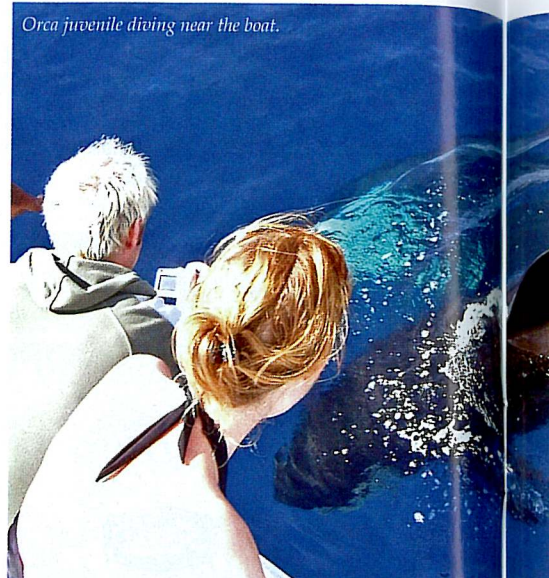
He turns to a dive staff team member who immediately exclaims: "That's an orca!" They change the course of our boat towards the huge tailfin. We approach the pod of orcas as they swim fast from the east to meet us on the starboard side of our boat.

It is a pod of six orcas - two large ones, three of medium size and a juvenile. Now the orcas begin to dive underneath our boat in different formations, time and time again, over several minutes. We can't believe it but we are all very excited!

We begin to take pictures of the orcas with our digital cameras. Their heads break the water many times directly next to the boat.

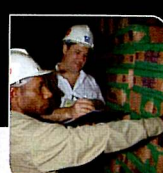
After about five minutes,

Orca juvenile diving near the boat.



Orca passing the boat.

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I jump into the water with my underwater camera.

An inquisitive group of orcas swims directly past me. The pod leaves and swims northwards (towards Cape Campbell and Lake Dakataua). We follow them slowly in our boat.

Three orcas taking a breath.



Orca as seen from the boat.

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Orca close-up.

the dive staff and I were on the other side. Now, four orcas approach us fast from straight ahead, emerging from a depth of several metres to about 1.5 metres. They swim around us quite closely for a while and then the pod dives off and disappears.

The third orca encounter

We are following the orcas slowly northwards. We are scanning the surface of the sea very closely across the bow and towards starboard and port. I am standing at the stern ready to jump in - mask, snorkel and camera, all ready.

After a while, I turn around and to my astonishment, I see a huge orca tailfin behind me in

the wake of the boat. We are actually being followed by orcas! I shout, "behind". The crew members turn off the engine. I jump into the water, followed by Stefan and Maria, to get closer to the large orcas behind the boat.

The whole pod approaches me (us) one more time. They linger near the boat for quite a

The second orca encounter

We watch the orcas occasionally surfacing ahead of us. As we get closer, the dive staff members begin to assemble the outriggers for the dolphin nets. This special construction, developed by Max Benjamin of the Walindi

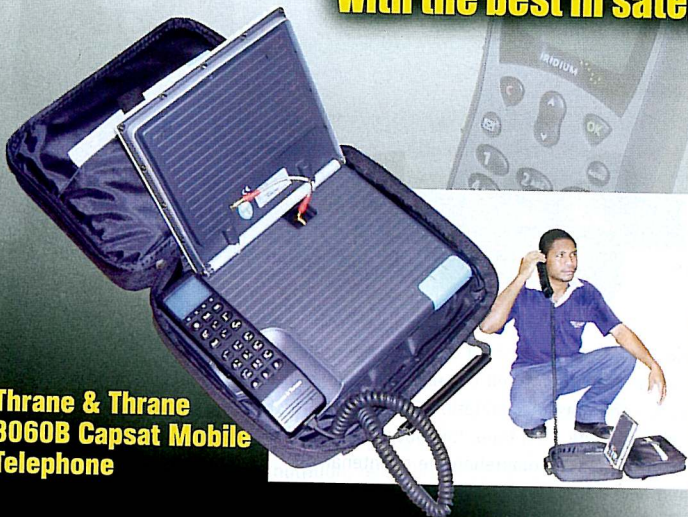
Plantation Resort, was actually designed for watching dolphins.

Fully mounted, the coarsely meshed nets can be used by two people on either side of the boat to hold on to at slow speed. Stefan and Maria were on one side while a buddy from



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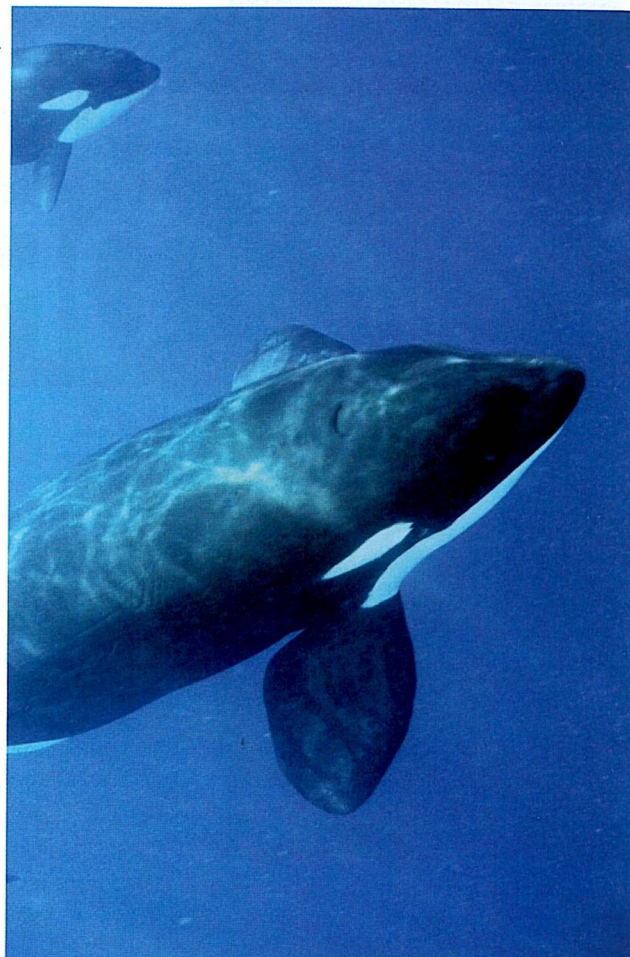
while. It is only then that they finally disappeared into the deep blue of the open water of Kimbe Bay. We keep snorkelling around the boat for a short while before we resume the trip to the diving area "Zero Fighter". 🐬

• Thomas Kuhn lives in Darmstadt, Germany. He is a senior information researcher in charge of research on Asia at a large development bank. Thomas Kuhn has been a passionate diver since 1989 and started underwater photography in 1999.

Four orcas swimming away.



Orca close-up.



FACT BOX

The orca (*Orcinus orca*) is a whale species also known by the name of "killer whale". It is a member of the dolphin family (Delphinidae) and belongs to the sub-family Orcininae. Its average length is 5.5 to 9.8 metres and can weigh between 2.6 and 9 tons.



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