



Dolphin Safari recognized

Charter business joins program to protect porpoises

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and its partners this week recognized the first charter operator under a new program designed to protect wild dolphins.

Key West's Dolphin Safari Charters officially joined the Dolphin SMART program after successfully meeting standards that promote responsible viewing of wild dolphins.

"We're pleased to welcome Dolphin Safari Charters as the first participant in what we hope will become a popular and successful program to promote sustainable dolphin watch tourism," said sanctuary Superintendent Dave Score. "Dolphin SMART represents a positive approach to protecting wild dolphins by working in partnership with the businesses that depend on them."

Sanctuary staff worked with NOAA Fisheries Service, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Dolphin Ecology Project to establish the program, which is funded by NOAA Fisheries and the "Protect Wild Dolphins" license plate funds through the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution.

The acronym "SMART" is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins.
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance.
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near.
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins.
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

"I have always had great respect for dolphins in the wild and want to help preserve them in their natural habitat for future generations to learn about and enjoy," said Gary Stanyer, Dolphin Safari Charters owner. "By participating in Dolphin SMART, I can give my clients a great trip while teaching them the proper respect for these wonderful marine creatures."

Upon acceptance into the voluntary program, Dolphin SMART charters receive flags and stickers and permission to use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising.

Each year, participants are evaluated to ensure they're continuing to meet program standards. By looking for the current year on flags and logos and checking the updated participant list, visitors to the Florida Keys seeking the thrill of seeing dolphins in the wild can ensure the tour operator they select is Dolphin SMART.

For more information, visit <http://www.dolphinSMART.org> or call program coordinator Celeste Weimer at 743-2437, Ext. 22.

For more on the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Dolphin Ecology Project, visit <http://www.whales.org>, <http://www.wdcs.org> and <http://www.dolphinecology.org>.



Coastal Atlantic bottlenose dolphins viewed by watchers aboard Dolphin Safari Charters can rest assured they won't be bothered. The charter's 'We do not swim with, feed, harass, or endanger dolphins' motto is in line with Dolphin SMART's mission.

Keynoter photo by STEVE SANOSKI