MATING BEHAVIOR IN ATLANTIC BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS (*Tursiops truncatus*)

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Observations of courtship behaviors and copulation in two, captive populations of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) were utilized to assess male mating strategies. Data were collected opportunistically on courtship and copulation over a seven-year period, including information on time of day, season, age, intercopulatory interval, parity, and female reproductive state. The rate of male pre-copulatory behavior peaked during the female estrous cycle (i.e. summer months) but was not limited to that time of year. Courtship displays were observed between males and females of varying ages, but male courtship and copulatory behaviors occurred in highest frequencies in association with older females with greatest parity, even if they were still nursing calves. So, although younger, sexually mature females without calves would presumably be more receptive to conception, males preferentially associated with mature females, regardless of their reproductive state. Therefore, although polygamous by nature, some dolphin males formed exclusive consortships with females, suggesting that individual male dolphins may adopt unconventional reproductive strategies to attract, acquire, and maintain mating access to particular females if distribution permits such associations. These observations suggest that dolphin mating systems may be more complex than once thought and demonstrate the need for more research on dolphin courtship and copulatory behavior.