

Social behavior affects genetic makeup in dolphins

A UNSW-led team of researchers studying bottlenose dolphins that use sponges as tools has shown that social behaviour can shape the genetic makeup of an animal population in the wild.

Some of the dolphins in Shark Bay in Western Australia put conical marine sponges on their rostrums (beaks) when they forage on the sea floor – a non-genetic skill that calves apparently learn from their mother.

Lead author, Dr Anna Kopps, says sponging dolphins end up with some genetic similarities because the calves also inherit DNA from their mothers. As well, it is likely that sponging dolphins are descendants of a “sponging Eve”, a female dolphin that first developed the innovation.

Read the full, original story: [Cultural hitchhiking: How social behavior can affect genetic makeup in dolphins](#)