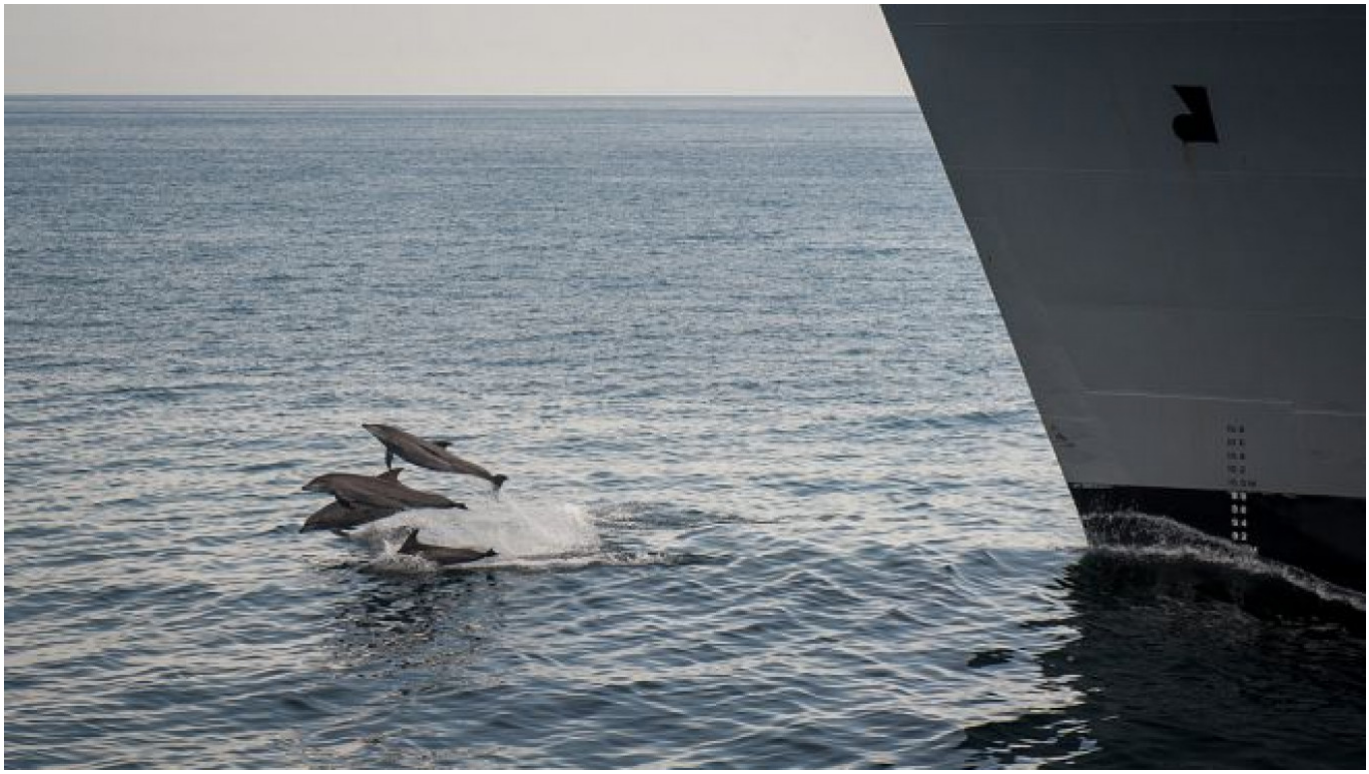
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Crimea Aquarium Restarts Russian Navy Dolphin Training

March 26, 2014



Dolphins (not military dolphins) swimming in front of a U.S. naval ship.

An aquarium in Russia's recently annexed subject Sevastopol will resume cooperation with the Russian Navy on the training of military sea mammals, an activity which stems back to the Soviet era.

The Akvamarin Sevastopol facility was handed over to Ukraine after the breakup of the Soviet Union and had been training dolphins to swim with special needs children and be used in therapy sessions ever since.

But now that the city, home to Russia's Black Sea fleet, became Russian following Crimea's annexation last week, dolphins and seals will once again receive naval training, an unidentified aquarium employee told RIA Novosti.

The employee said that engineers were working to develop an improved program to help train the dolphins to find sunken objects and enemies underwater using sonar.

The Ukrainian navy had lacked the resources to fund such projects and the facility was forced to sell 20 marine mammals to an Iranian tourism magnate In March 2000 in order to keep the business afloat.

During the late sixties, the Soviet Union used the Sevastopol base to train the mammals for military purposes such as planting explosives on ships or searching for mines. Whether they actually engaged in military activity is disputed but the dolphins were later used to locate lost military and scientific equipment.

The country's navy denied a 2012 report saying that it was developing a program training dolphins to attack enemy divers with knives or pistols attached to their heads. The Soviet program was also thought to include training on how to kill underwater enemies.

RIA Novosti reported earlier this month that three male dolphins had escaped from the Sevastopol facility, possibly in search of female dolphins they had met during mating season. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry later denied the report, saying that the document it was based on was forged.

There are currently only two military dolphin training facilities in the world, the second of which is located in the U.S. naval base city San Diego.

Original url:
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