

Name: _____

It's Not a Bird... Not a Plane... It's a Flying Fish!

by Guy Belleranti

Did you know there is group of fish known as flying fish?

Flying fish are found in all the major oceans. There are over 40 known species. They are most common in warmer tropical and sub-tropical areas.

Of course, a flying fish doesn't actually fly like a birds does. But it can jump out of the water and glide through the air. How does it do this?

First, the flying fish swims near the water's surface. Holding its side (pectoral) fins close to its body, the fish's tail (called the caudal fin) propels the torpedo-shaped fish at speeds of 35 to 40 miles per hour. The tail is forked, with the lower lobe longer than the upper lobe. This lower lobe acts like an outboard motor. Angling upward, the fish bursts above the water's surface and into the air. Then the fish spreads its extra large pectoral fins and glides for hundreds of feet. What a great way to escape predators like mackerel, marlin, tuna and swordfish!

Flying fish have even been known to land on the decks of ships!

In some parts of the world fishermen scoop flying fish right out of the air with nets. Sea birds also sometimes scoop flying fish out of the air.



Night fishermen use lights to help them catch flying fish. The fishermen know that flying fish are attracted to the lights so this is a great way to lure the fish to their boats and canoes.

Near Catalina Island, off the coast of California, night tour boats also use lights. But this time the lights are used to attract flying fish for tourists to see not for fishermen to catch. One type of flying fish that might be seen on these tours is the California flying fish. It's one of the largest species, growing up to 18 inches long. It is also one of the "four-winged" types of flying fish. This means that both it's both pectoral fins and rear (pelvic) fins are enlarged.

Flying fish may not actually fly, but watching them shoot out of the water and glide above it is an exciting sight to see.

About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.

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1. If you were a fisherman trying to catch flying fish, which tools might you use?
- a. fishing poles and rubber lures
 - b. buckets, minnows, and rope
 - c. spotlights and nets
 - d. worms, sticks, and hands



2. Where would you be most likely to see a flying fish?
- a. Florida
 - b. Alaska
 - c. Maine
 - d. Ireland

3. Name some of the predators of the flying fish.

4. How does flying help flying fish to survive in the wild?

4. Explain one way flying can make these fish vulnerable to predators.

5. Flying fish don't really fly. They glide. Explain how gliding is different from flying.

Something else to try: With a parent or teacher's supervision, go on the Internet and find a video of flying fish.

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Fill in the missing letters to create a word from the article.

Then, write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ___ r o ___ ___ l

clue: to push forward

1. _____

2. ___ o ___ k e ___

clue: having two branches; divided; split

2. _____

3. ___ ___ r e

clue: to attract

3. _____

4. ___ i ___ ___ ___ r ___ e ___

clue: people who catch fish

4. _____

5. ___ t ___ ___ ___ c ___ e d

clue: drawn or pulled towards

5. _____

6. ___ ___ ___ o ___ s

clue: small, skinny, open boats

6. _____

7. ___ ___ l ___ ___ d

clue: land that is completely surrounded by water

7. _____

ANSWER KEY

It's Not a Bird... It's Not a Plane... It's a Flying Fish!

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1. If you were a fisherman trying to catch flying fish, which tools might you use? **c**
- a. fishing poles and rubber lures
 - b. buckets, minnows, and rope
 - c. **spotlights and nets**
 - d. worms, sticks, and hands

2. Where would you be most likely to see a flying fish?
- a. **Florida**
 - b. Alaska
 - c. Maine
 - d. Ireland



3. Name some of the predators of the flying fish.

Predators include mackerel, marlin, tuna, swordfish, and humans.

4. How does flying help flying fish to survive in the wild?

Flying fish can jump out of the water to escape predators.

4. Explain one way flying can make these fish vulnerable to predators.

When flying fish jump out of the water, they can be caught by birds and fishermen.

5. Flying fish don't really fly. They glide. Explain how gliding is different from flying.

When a bird flies, it uses its own power to go up into the air. Flying animals can stay up indefinitely, or as long as their muscle power allows. When animals glide, they are coasting through the air as they are gradually being returned downward.

Something else to try: With a parent or teacher's supervision, go on the Internet and find a video of flying fish.

There are many online.

One good one is at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nEwte-x-iw>

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1. p r o p e l

clue: to push forward

1. propel

2. f o r k e d

clue: having two branches; divided; split

2. forked

3. l u r e

clue: to attract

3. lure

4. f i s h e r m e n

clue: people who catch fish

4. fishermen

5. a t t r a c t e d

clue: drawn or pulled towards

5. attracted

6. c a n o e s

clue: small, skinny, open boats

6. canoes

7. i s l a n d

clue: land that is completely surrounded by water

7. island