

ENCANTADO:

by Sy Montgomery

Pink Dolphin of the Amazon

Genre

Expository Text provides factual information about a topic. As you read, look for facts about pink dolphins to add to your knowledge of animals.



Question of the Week

Why do animals behave the way they do?



ENCOUNTERS *with* ENCANTADOS



You're traveling to a world that is full of water.

In the Amazon, the wet season lasts half the year. During the rainiest part of the wet season, from March through May, it rains every day. Not all day but every day. Sometimes the rain lasts less than an hour, and then the bright, hot sun comes out to burn your skin. But every day there is some kind of downpour.

The wet season is the best time of year to explore the Amazon. You'll soon see why. So bring a poncho. On your expedition, you will watch the rain remake this jungle world. Swollen with rainwater, the Amazon River and its many branches—smaller rivers called tributaries—overflow their dry-season banks. The rivers flood people's gardens. Water

covers the village soccer fields. The school playgrounds are underwater. Instead of taking a school bus to class, the kids take a canoe.

The village school is like a treehouse, perched high on stilts. Many of the village houses are built on stilts too. Others float on the river, like rafts. People have to tie their floating houses to big trees so they don't drift away.

On your expedition, you'll sleep in a jungle lodge on stilts. You'll visit Amazon villages where the little girls play with real baby caimans (a kind of crocodile) the way girls at home play with dolls—and where the people will tell you stories about amazing creatures they call "encantados."

Encantado means the same thing in Portuguese (the language most people speak in Brazil) and in Spanish (which people speak in Peru and many other South American countries). It means "**enchanted**." And once you meet an encantado on the river, you'll know why.



Some village houses float on the river.





WHALES of the AMAZON

Everything about them sounds impossible: pink dolphins! Dolphins who live in rivers, not in the ocean. And not just any rivers: these are rain-forest dolphins, who swim in a submerged jungle.

And look how they do it. Unlike the athletic dolphins who jump through hoops for aquarium shows, pink dolphins don't leap out of the water. Watch: they swim slowly, low in the water. They don't look like "regular" dolphins, either: Unlike the ones who swim in the sea, the pink dolphin doesn't have a tall, pointed fin on the back, sticking out of the water like a shark's. Pink dolphins just have a low ridge, which makes them difficult to spot.

Besides making sounds from their mouths, dolphins (as well as many whales) can also send out pulses of sound, like an invisible beam of light, from inside their foreheads. The sound beams are too high-pitched for our ears. Listening with the help of special underwater microphones and recording devices, scientists have learned that these sounds are a series of pulsed clicks. The clicks travel through the water. When they hit an object—a tree branch, a tasty fish, or even a swimming person—the sounds come bouncing back to the dolphin. That's right—it's an echo. Dolphins can locate objects by their echoes. That's why this sense is called echolocation. It's also sometimes called sonar, which ships and submarines use to probe the water too.

In fact, the echoes form a three-dimensional image in the dolphin's brain, allowing the animal to "see" not only the object's shape and size but also its insides.



Pink dolphins make sounds from their mouths. They also send out pulses of sound from inside their foreheads.



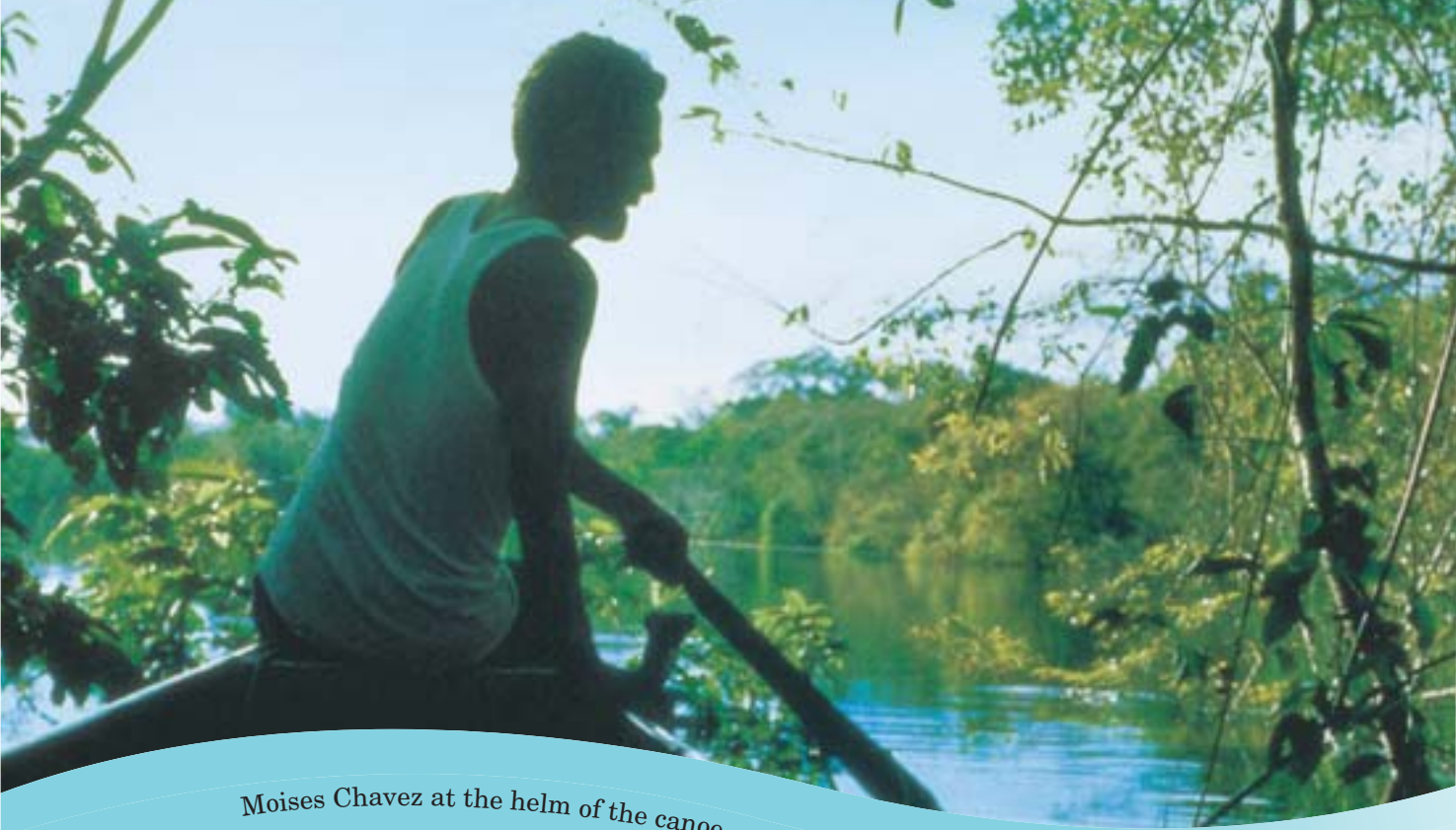
Dolphin doughnut: a pink dolphin touches its tail to its nose.

In addition to this super-sonar, pink dolphins have another special talent. Ocean dolphins' bodies don't bend very well. They'd never be able to get around all the branches in the Amazon. Pink dolphins can bend their bodies to twist gracefully through the underwater treetops. They are so flexible they can even touch their tail to their nose—like a dolphin doughnut.

Because of their unique flexibility, pink dolphins can also swim in shallow waters that ocean dolphins can't manage. Sometimes they get stuck—but not for long. You probably have already noticed that pink dolphins have really big front flippers—almost like wings. At moments like these, those flippers come in handy. Pink dolphins can use their front flippers not just to swim but also to crawl—both out of and back into the water!

Sometimes pink dolphins' behavior seems downright weird. Here's another example: sometimes they sleep upside down. Imagine finding a 300-pound dolphin floating upside down like a dead goldfish! Why do they do this? Why don't other dolphins?

No one knows. And that's just one of the mysteries about them.



Moises Chavez at the helm of the canoe

NIGHTMARE DREAM WORLD

Canoeing through the flooded forest feels like a dream.

Strange lives cling to every tree. Fist-sized, hairy megalomorph spiders, who look like tarantulas, hunt for bugs in tree holes. The purselike nests of little birds called oropendulas hang from the tips of branches. Centipedes curl in the cracks of bark. Snails cling to the undersides of leaves.

“Duck!” Moises Chavez (MOY-sess SHAH-vez), your Peruvian guide, calls out from the front of the boat.

A duck? Where? But no—he motions you to get your head down, fast. You don’t want to smack your head on a low branch as the canoe glides beneath it. Particularly this branch—because hanging down from it is a wasp nest the size of a pumpkin.

Fortunately, Moises knows these waterways well. He can warn you of the dangers. He grew up in the Amazon rain forest. His father was a teacher working in Amazonian Indian villages. Moises speaks some of the Indian languages, as well as Spanish and English. He has learned many of the jungle’s secrets, including where to find the pink dolphins.

Today he’s taking you to his favorite lake, where he knows you’ll see pink dolphins. But to get there, you have to thread through twisting waterways, the heart of the Amazon rain forest.

Trees poke out of the water on all sides. Moises explains that it’s important to keep your hands away from the sides of the boat. It’s easy to see why. Some of the trees have spines growing out of their trunks. “They’re sharp as needles,” he says. “Don’t touch the trees! See this guy”—he points to a tree with smooth bark—“this guy has sap that can burn your skin. And this guy,” he says, pointing to a short tree with yellow flowers, “from its leaves you can make a tea to cure yellow fever. And this guy—”



Electric eels live in the Amazon River.

A centipede



Hairy megalomorph spiders defend themselves with the hairs on their legs.

BANG!

Your canoe has come to an abrupt halt. The bottom is hung up on an underwater tree limb.

Your canoe is stuck in the treetops!

But Moises quickly gets the situation under control by pushing against a tree to free the canoe.

You're over the log, but you're not out of trouble.

"Watch out!" calls Moises. "Tangarana tree!"

Moises recognizes the tree's long, oval leaves right away. And he also knows that its hollow stems teem with thousands of stinging black tangarana ants. Each ant is more than an inch long. When something bumps against the tree, the ants think it's an attack on their home. Bravely, they'll rush to defend it. They'll even jump off branches into your canoe to sting you if they think their tree is threatened.

At the last minute, with some skilled paddling, Moises veers the canoe away from its dangerous path. You miss the ant tree by inches.

And then, pushing aside some branches like a curtain on a stage, Moises reveals your destination: the dolphin lake. You've made it.

During the dry season, the lake is little more than a puddle. But now, full of rainwater, it covers an area larger than a thousand football fields. It's shaped like a figure eight, with the crown of a mimosa tree poking up the middle.

Across the lake you can hear a dolphin blowing: "CHHHAAA!"

Some trees protect themselves with sharp spines.



The tangarana tree is home to thousands of stinging black tangarana ants.



REFLECTIONS *on the* WATER

You're surrounded.

At first, it seemed that you would see the dolphins only far away—just a pink shimmer on the water's **surface**. At first glance, you weren't sure whether you really saw one or just imagined it.

But Moises had a great idea. "Let's call them," he suggested. He leaned over the side of the canoe and, reaching underwater, banged on the side of the boat with his knuckles. The dolphins responded. And now they are all around you.

Right behind your canoe, you hear one blow. You twirl around, but all you see is the dolphin's wake, the wave it made when it dived just a split second ago. Then—"CHAAHHH!" A dolphin surfaces in front. "Look!" cries Moises—but you see only a trail of bubbles.

A diving dolphin leaves a wake and a trail of bubbles.



This pink dolphin looks almost like a reflection on the water.

SPLASH! Off to your left, a big pink form has surfaced. But by the time you turn, you see only a tail.

If the water were clear, as in an aquarium tank, you could see them swimming beneath the surface. But the water in the lake is as dark as night. It's not polluted; it's stained with natural chemicals from decaying rain-forest leaves.

Because of the dark water, it's impossible to count the dolphins. It certainly seems there are several. After all, one surfaced in back of the boat, then one in front of the boat. Another rose to the side. Does that mean there were three dolphins?

Maybe not. Remember that pink dolphins, with their bendy bodies, don't have to swim in a straight line. You can't predict where they might surface next. They can turn and twist beneath the water, even whirl around like a Ferris wheel. Maybe the three **glimpses** you had were all of the same dolphin.

How would you tell? Most animals, including dolphins, look as different from one another as people do. You just have to learn to see the differences. Some are bigger than the others, some are darker. One might have a notch or a scar on the back or head. One might have a bent snout.

But here's the problem: because pink dolphins don't leap out of the water, and because the lake water is so dark, you never see much of any individual dolphin at one time. You get only little glimpses: the glistening pink top of a head here, a tail there, a quick look at the low fin on the back here. And you can't identify them by color, because these dolphins grow pinker with exercise, just as people do.

For half an hour, the dolphins, whether one or several, continue to visit near your canoe. Could they be as curious about you as you are about them?

As you and Moises paddle back to the lodge for dinner, you're full of questions about the dolphins. How many of them visit the lake? Do they stay there all year, or do they move to other lakes and rivers? Are there mothers with babies among them? What kinds of fish do they like to eat?

Moises knows a lot about the wildlife in the Amazon. But even he doesn't know the answers to your questions. "The bufeo*, they are very mysterious," he says.

****Bufeo colorado*** (Boo-FEY-oh co-low-RAH-doe) is another name for the pink dolphin. *Bufeo* is the local word for *dolphin*. *Colorado* is a Spanish word that means "ruddy or reddish."

Because they are difficult to study in the wild, pink dolphins remain a mystery to scientists.



The water is so dark you can't tell who might be swimming in there with you!
This nose (above) belongs to a huge Amazonian manatee.

