

Marine Biologist

Study life in the ocean, mostly fish and plankton rather than dolphins, and spend years on seasonal contracts before anything permanent.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,780

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$49k to \$126k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 10 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Research vessels, shore labs, aquariums, federal and state agen...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and statistics. Volunteer at an aquarium, a hatchery or a beach cleanup, and learn to swim well.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Marine biology, biology or ecology. Take statistics and a coding course even though nobody tells you to. Get on a boat every summer you can.
- 3 Technician seasons** 1 to 3 years
Two or three field or lab contracts. This is the real entry exam, and it is how you meet the people who later hire you.
- 4 Master's degree** 2 to 3 years
Two to three years on one specific question, usually funded by teaching. The normal price of a permanent research or agency job.
- 5 Doctorate, only if you want to run research** 5 to 6 years
Needed to lead your own lab or teach at a university. Funded with a stipend, and the job market at the end is tight.

Pros and cons

- + Work outdoors and on the water that most people pay to do on vacation
- + Your surveys feed real decisions about fishing and protected areas
- + Federal and state jobs come with strong benefits
- Job growth is below average, so competition is heavy
- Years of seasonal contracts before anything permanent
- Pay is low compared with other science degrees

Optional boosts

Scientific diving authorization. Small boat operator training. Sea survival and first aid. Statistics and coding.

Good to know

Most of the work is fish, not dolphins

The large employers are fisheries agencies. That means counting cod, salmon, pollock and shellfish, sampling plankton and measuring water chemistry. Marine mammal jobs exist, but there are very few of them...

There is a paid internship for high schoolers

The Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program places high school students with a working fisheries scientist for a summer. Very few career fields offer anything like it before college.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Zoologists and Wildlife Biologists
NOAA Fisheries careers and student opportunities
Scripps Institution of Oceanography education programs
National Sea Grant program

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/marine-biologist>



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