Oregon Coast Aquarium
Oceanscape Network

Whales, Dolphins & Porpoises

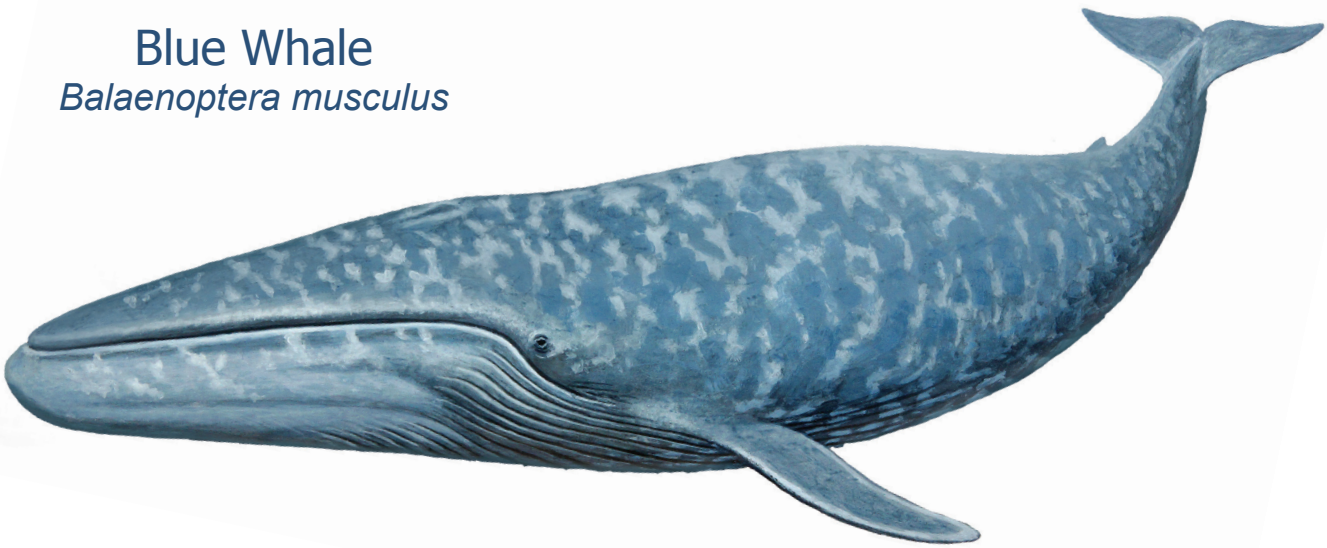
of Oregon

Illustrations by Michael Cole

oceanscape.aquarium.org

Blue Whale

Balaenoptera musculus



With adult specimens measuring up to 98 feet (30 m) in length, no animal, either terrestrial or marine, modern or prehistoric, has come close to the sheer size of the Blue Whale. This gentle and reclusive cetacean is the largest animal to ever live on Earth. The whales are so big that when they spout their spray has been recorded as reaching 30 feet (9.1 m) into the air. Their newborns measure over 25 feet (8 meters) in length and weigh as much as 3 tons (2.7 metric tons). They are also the largest carnivore, although they prey almost exclusively on tiny shrimp like animals called krill. They use fringed plates of baleen attached to the upper jaw to filter their food out of the water. The baleen acts like a net which catches the krill but allows water to pass through. A typical adult whale may consume up to 4 tons (3.6 metric tons) of krill every day.

Because the whales are so large, they are difficult to photograph or even observe in the natural environment unless done from the air. Still, Blue Whales can be identified by a long, tapering body which is more slender than most other whale species. The head is flat and has a distinctive U-shaped crest which reaches from the blowhole around the perimeter of the upper jaw. Compared to its size, it has an extremely small dorsal fin. The body color is gray in most individuals, although it can sometimes be mottled with patches of darker gray, black or blue.

Range and Habitat

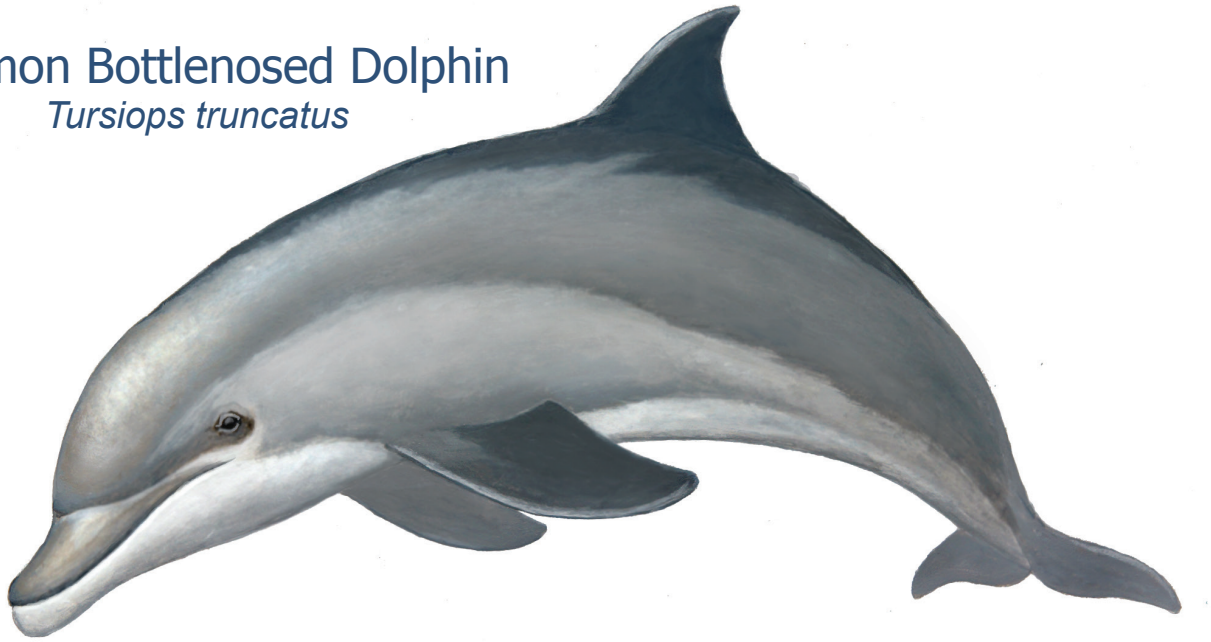
Blue Whales are found in every ocean on Earth but do not roam to the polar regions. They are pelagic animals, meaning they live almost exclusively in the open ocean, rarely straying into coastal areas near land. They stay close to the surface of the water where krill is plentiful and generally live in extended family groups called pods.

Conservation Status

Prior to their population being decimated in the 1900s, Blue Whales existed across the globe in large pods, which could number 230,000 or more individuals. Today, the whale is listed as endangered by the The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Like all whales, hunting of the Blue Whale is prohibited by US law and they are protected in US territorial waters.

Common Bottlenosed Dolphin

Tursiops truncatus



The Common Bottlenose Dolphin is the largest of the beaked dolphins and is identified by its uniform gray coloring, curved dorsal fin and prominent snout — a remanent of a nose from before they evolved the blowhole on the top of their heads. Adult males can grow up to 13 feet long (3.9 m) and females are slightly smaller with a maximum length of 11.5 feet (3.5). Adults can range in weight from 1,100 to 1,400 lbs (498 to 635 kg).

Like most mammals, the Common Bottlenose Dolphin gives birth to live young. Juveniles will generally live out their lives with their parents, siblings and other relatives in groups known as pods. Sometimes pods may join together, forming herds which can number several hundred individuals. Dolphins within these communities work together to hunt or defend against threats; communicating with each other through a complex series of chirps and clicks which are not fully understood by scientists.

This is likely the best known cetacean in the world due to their widespread display in marine parks, movies and television. Their high intelligence and curiosity makes them extremely trainable and they've even been used for a variety of U.S. military operations, including locating underwater mines or identifying enemy divers.

Range and Habitat

The Common Bottlenose Dolphin can be found in all parts of the world ocean except for the polar regions. They are rare in Oregon waters due to their preference for warmer waters. Studies conducted in the early 2000s by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) placed their numbers at no more than 1,000 individuals in Oregon waters. This population size can fluctuate widely based on time of year.

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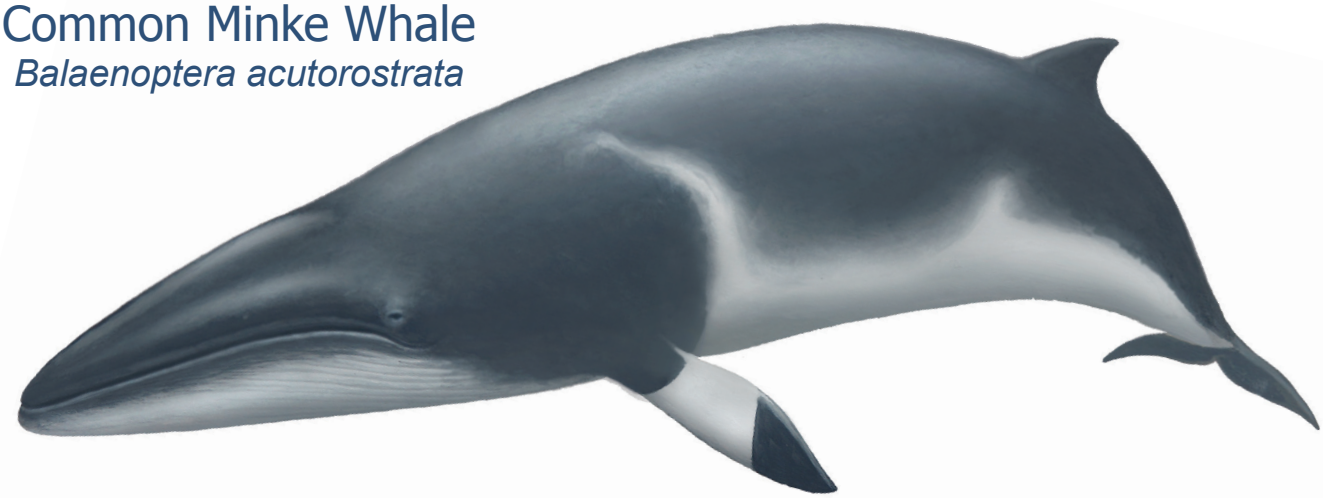
Conservation Status

While none of the three subspecies of this dolphin (*T. truncatus, T. aduncus* and *T. australis*) are considered threatened, they are considered vulnerable to a variety of factors which may imperil their future survival, including competition with humans for food sources. Like other cetaceans, they are widely protected by numerous laws and international accords. In U.S. waters, the hunting or capture of dolphins is prohibited by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Common Minke Whale

Balaenoptera acutorostrata



The Common Minke (pronounced mink-ee) Whale belongs to a large group of baleen whales known collectively as rorquals. Other members of this group including the Blue Whale, Sei Whale and the Fin Whale. Rorquals are identifiable by the deeply furrowed skin folds which run from the edge of the mouth to the navel. This loose skin allows rorquals to open their mouths wider than other whales, a necessary adaptation for these filter-feeders as they strain huge amounts of water for krill and plankton. The Minke is the smallest of the rorquals, with adults measuring up to 35 feet (10 m) and weighing approximately 20,000 pounds (9,200 kg). Although their appearance may change based on geographical location, in general these whales have sleek-shaped bodies with a black back, a pale belly and a small dorsal fin.

This marine mammal is alternately known as the Northern Minke Whale. There is also one known subspecies called the Antarctic Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*). The Dwarf Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) may be a third subspecies, but this has not been definitively verified.

Range and Habitat

The whale has a wide range with populations in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. They prefer colder water and are more likely spotted at higher latitudes. Most will migrate seasonally between latitudes, although the Common Minke Whales living in Oregon waters are considered “residents” and do not migrate.

Conservation Status

The populations of Common Minke Whale in U.S. waters are considered stable, although other populations around the world are not faring as well. Like most large whales, the Minke was hunted starting in the 1930s until international agreements put an end to most of these practices. Greenland, Japan and Norway still hunt these whales for food and raw resources.

The whale is protected by U.S. law but climate change, marine debris, habitat destruction and noise pollution caused on sonar continue to threaten their survival.

Dall's Porpoise

Phocoenoides dalli

The Dall's Porpoise is a small marine mammal found in the northern reaches of the Pacific Ocean. In terms of its coloration, it looks similar to its much larger cousin, the Orca. Its body is primarily dark gray or black with white patches on the flanks and belly. It has a small dorsal fin in the middle of its back and a short tail with small flukes.

Despite their somewhat awkward-looking shape, these animals are quick and acrobatic. They can reach speeds up to 35 miles per hour (55 kph), making tight turns as they chase down fish or producing large sprays of water as they barrel just under the surface of the water. Like many dolphins and porpoises, the Dall's Porpoise will often swim in the artificial current produced by boats in behaviors known as "bow riding" or "wake riding."

Renowned deep-sea divers, the porpoise has been recorded as diving over 300 feet (91 m) in search of prey. Preferred quarry include Pacific Herring, Northern Anchovy, Mackerel and Hake. Their primary predators are the Orca and Great White Shark.

Range and Habitat

The Dall's Porpoise is found only in the north Pacific Ocean, with its southernmost boundary being the waters off southern California. In the northwest part of the Pacific, it can be found near Russia and Japan, including in the Bering and Okhotsk Seas and the Sea of Japan. They are common in the San Juan Islands off Washington state. The porpoise prefers deep, cold waters along the continental shelf and in deep underwater canyons. It is rarely found close to shore.

Conservation Status

The Dall's Porpoise is a species of concern for conservationists. Few people had heard of this animal prior to the 1970s when it became notable as one of several cetaceans being caught and killed in trawl nets used by salmon fishermen. The plight of the Dall's Porpoise helped change the American fishing industry through the development of "dolphin safe" techniques which limit cetacean mortality. In other parts of the world, however, these safeguards do not exist. About 16,000 Dall's Porpoises are still killed annually, mostly through Japanese fisheries.

Gray Whale

Eschrichtius robustus

Perhaps the best known of the Oregon whale species, “Grays” enthrall residents and visitors alike as they make their yearly migrations along the coast. Numerous whale watching boats will trail the behemoths from a safe distance as their passengers click away with cameras as the whales breach and spout. The sharp-eyed observer can actually see Grays from land, particularly when standing on a high headland. The whales make two migrations along the west coast of North America. The first begins in October as they head south to avoid the ice packs of the north Pacific. Along the way, they will breed and then give birth in the warm waters of the Baja peninsula and the Gulf of California. By the following March or April, now with young in tow, the Grays will head north along the same route. It is believed that these whales have the longest migration pattern of any mammal on earth, up to 14,000 miles (22,000 km).

An extremely old species, fossil evidence of the Gray Whale extends back 500,000 years. Gray Whales are the last living member of the genus Eschrichtius and family Eschrichtiidae. Their closest living relatives are thought to be the Humpback and Fin Whales, although these species have very different skeletal structures. The Gray Whale can be identified by its slate-gray skin which is often covered with light gray mottling. The body is streamlined and tapers to a narrow head. There is a prominent lower jaw and a mouth that arches upward toward the eye. Instead of a dorsal fin, it has a prominent hump and a broad fluke measuring up to 12 feet (3.6 meters) across. Females are generally larger in size than males, with adult specimens reaching up to 46 feet (14 meters).

The whale’s mouth is filled with plates of baleen which it uses to sift out crustaceans and tube worms. To feed, the whale will dive to the ocean floor and scoop out great mouthfuls of mud. Water and sediment is then forced out through the baleen, leaving behind the food. Gray Whales have few natural predators, with the Orca (“Killer Whale”) being the most dangerous. Whale spotters will often notice Orca-inflicted wounds and scars on Grays at sea.

Range and Habitat

Gray Whales stay mostly in the shallow coastal waters from Canada to Mexico. This is especially true when mothers are accompanying their calves on their northern migration back to the Bering and Chukchi Seas between Alaska and Russia. Their preference for coastal waters makes them a frequently spotted species.

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Conservation Status

There are only two major areas where Gray Whales still exist in the world's oceans. The west coast of the Americas contains the largest population, with a smaller one in the western Pacific near Asia. Due to whale hunting, the Gray population in this latter area was considered critically endangered. Grays no longer exist in the Atlantic Ocean. In American waters, Gray Whales are protected by both federal law and international agreement and they have made a remarkable recovery thanks to international between the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Today, it is estimated that over 20,000 Gray Whales live in the coastal waters of the Americas. They were removed from the Endangered Species List in 1994.

Harbor Porpoise

Phocoena phocoena

This is one of the smallest species of porpoise, with adults rarely measuring longer than 6 feet (1.8 m) and weighing less than 170 lbs (77 kg). Adult females will be slightly larger than males. The porpoise's body is dark gray, often with speckled sides and a lighter colored belly. They have a triangular-shaped dorsal fin and a small, almost imperceptible beak.

This porpoise feeds mostly on schooling fish including Pacific Herring, plus squid and crustaceans. They are hunted by Orcas and Great White Sharks and some dolphins may kill them if they are competing for food supplies.

Range and Habitat

Subspecies of the Harbor Porpoise can be found in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Pacific variety can be found from the Sea of Japan east to the west coast of North America. Their southern boundary is California. A favorite animal for whale watchers, the Harbor Porpoise stays close to shore, often venturing into estuaries, bays, harbors or even miles up rivers.

Conservation Status

Common. Harbor Porpoises have been hunted by people since prehistoric times. Harvesting of this species reached its height during the nineteenth century when the animal's natural oils were widely used for lamp fuel. After the middle of the twentieth century, however, markets for Harbor Porpoise disappeared and the only place where its meat is regularly consumed by humans is in Greenland. Still, a variety of environmental factors including noise pollution, climate change and over-harvesting of the porpoises' prey present ongoing challenges.

Humpback Whale

Megaptera novaeangliae

The Humpback Whale is one of the most distinctive looking whales common to Oregon coastal waters. These animals are tremendously large, growing over fifty feet (16 m) in length. They are mostly black or dark gray in color, sometimes with a light gray belly. The whale has a large lower jaw and a mouth filled with baleen, a filtering structure used to strain krill from ocean water. The whale's head appears slender when seen in profile and is usually covered with knobs, projections and barnacles. Humpbacks also have a small dorsal fin and massive side flippers with scalloped edges.

An energetic species, Humpbacks are well known for their breaching behaviors – where the animal flings itself partially out of the water. Although Humpbacks were once seen in most of the world's oceans, they were widely slaughtered by whalers and their numbers dwindled. Thanks to a worldwide ban on whaling (still ignored by a handful of nations), the Humpbacks' numbers are slowly climbing but it is still considered endangered.

Range and Habitat

The Humpback Whale is a migratory animal and will travel from the Arctic waters between Alaska and Siberia to southern Mexico. They generally move along the coastlines, usually on the continental shelf or island banks. Sometimes, depending mostly on food availability, they will move out into the open sea. They generally pass through Oregon coastal waters in December and March as part of this migration pattern.

Conservation Status

Endangered worldwide.

Orca

Orcinus orca

One of the most striking and best known marine mammals, the Orca (often referred to as a Killer Whale) is the largest variety of dolphin and is considered the ocean's top predator. They are easily identified by their glossy black coloring with distinctive white markings near the eyes, behind the dorsal fin and along the belly. These markings, along with the shape of the dorsal fins, are so distinctive that research scientists use them to identify individual whales. These massive animals can reach lengths of up to 32 feet (9.8 m) for males and 28 feet (8.5 m) for females. The largest males can weigh in around 11 tons (9.9 t).

Orcas generally lives in extended family groups called "pods" that are led by a single female known as the "matriarch." The animals in the pods are highly social with each other, sharing responsibilities for hunting and protecting the more vulnerable members of the group including the calves. They will often communicate with each other, even over long distances, through a series of vocalizations which include clicks, chirps, squeaks and whistles. It is believed that Oregon's coastal waters are habitat for the yearly migration of three major Orca family groups, known as J, K, and L pods. These regular visitors are known as "Southern Residents." Orcas who travel in smaller groups and do not have as rigidly set migration patterns are referred to as "transient pods." The Southern Resident Orcas eat primarily fish, including salmon.

Range and Habitat

The Southern Resident Orcas spend May through October around the San Juan Islands and southern Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The rest of the year they largely disappear… and researchers aren't exactly sure where they go although it is suspected that they are in Oregon coastal waters due to numerous sightings. Part of the ongoing conservation efforts for the Southern Residents will include tracking the pods, a process that may utilize sophisticated underwater listening devices (hydrophones) that pick up and record Orca "song." If scientists can better understand the migration patterns of these whales, we might be more successful at preserving and even bolstering their numbers.

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Conservation Status

The Southern Resident Orcas are imperiled, listed as “endangered” in both Canada and the United States.

How you can help Oregon’s Orcas

Although Orcas are native to Oregon’s coastal waters, where they are during certain times of the year is still a mystery to biologists. To help understand these highly-intelligent and endangered animals, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association is asking for assistance from citizen-scientists by organizing an Orca spotting network. If you’re on the Oregon Coast and happen to spot an Orca – whether it be an individual or a family group called a “pod” – NOAA asks you to do the following:

Note the time, date and location of the sighting.

Count the total number of whales. If possible, note how many of the whales were adult males (will have a very tall dorsal fin) and how many were adult females or juveniles (a shorter dorsal fin.) If you noticed any calves (very young Orcas) in the pod, count them too if possible.

Look carefully for identifying marks, such as scars or notches in the dorsal fins. An Orca’s body coloring is as unique as human fingerprints, so if you’re lucky enough to notice any unusual markings this will help scientists identify individuals.

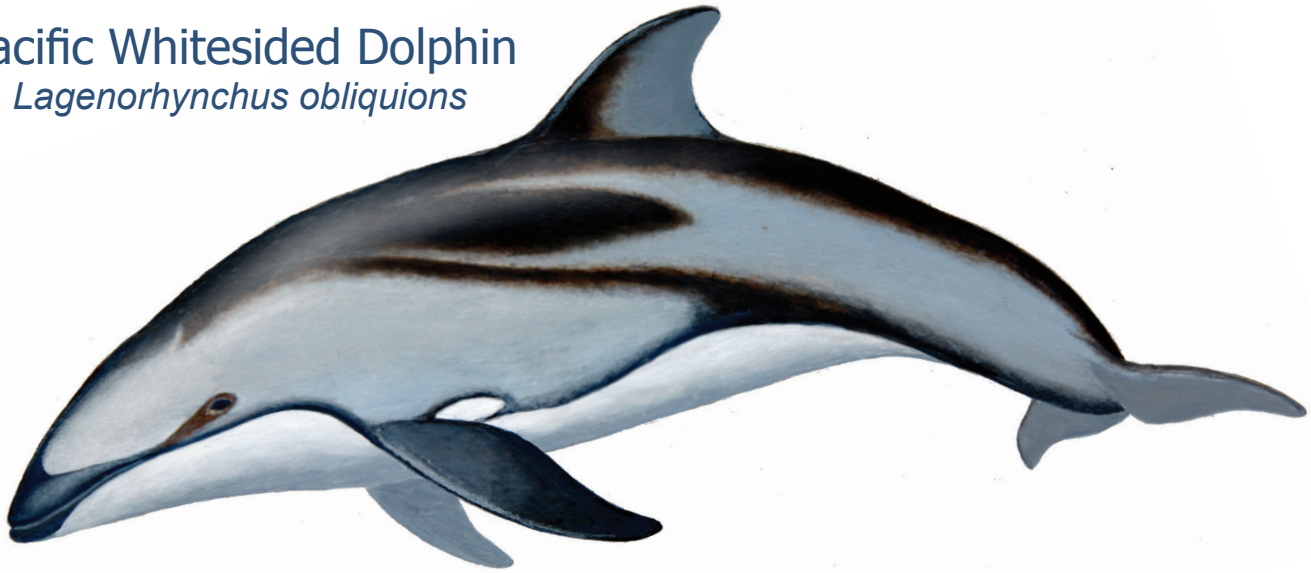
Note what direction the Orcas were moving.

What activities did the Orcas appear to be engaged in? Were they hunting? Playing? Leaping out of the water (breeching) or raising their heads out of the water to look at the environment around them (spy hopping)?

After making your notes (or taking photos or video), contact the reporting line at 1-866-672-2638. In you’re a minor, you should first ask for permission to file a sighting report with your parent or guardian. Be prepared to leave your full name and contact information with the reporting line operator.

Pacific Whitesided Dolphin

Lagenorhynchus obliquions



Robust and intricately colored, the Pacific Whitesided Dolphin is one of the most visually striking cetaceans in Oregon waters. The dolphin has a small beak and sleek, tapered flippers. It was once known as the “hookfin porpoise” because of its deeply-curved dorsal fin — even though it is not a porpoise. The animal’s lips, back and the tops of its flippers are black. It has a white belly and gray patches broken by black along its sides. A large gray patch under the dorsal fin resembles the letter “Y”. Its coloration sometimes causes it to often be misidentified as a Dall’s Porpoise although its body type is very different.

Adult dolphins will measure between 5.5 and 8 feet (1.7 to 2.5 m) and will weigh a maximum of 400 lbs (180 kg). Like other dolphins, they feed on a variety of invertebrates and fish, including squid, herring, sardines and capelin.

Playful and highly social, the Pacific Whitesided Dolphin lives in large family groups known as pods. They may congregate in larger groups numbering up to 10,000 individuals or be seen swimming with other cetaceans like Risso’s Dolphins. The will frequently approach boats to bow ride or demonstrate amazing acrobatics by hurling themselves out of the water and flipping in mid-air.

Range and Habitat

The Pacific Whitesided Dolphin is found only in the temperate waters of the north Pacific Ocean. Current estimates for the population living in California / Oregon / Washington waters is around 60,000 individuals, although they are mostly presently only during the summer months.

Conservation Status

Common. This dolphin is classified as “Low Risk / Least Concern” under the The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List. The primary threats to this species are accidental bycatch by the fishing industry and marine debris such as discarded or lost fishing nets. Like all cetaceans, they are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972

Risso's Dolphin

Grampus griseus

This is a medium-sized dolphin with a robust body and a slender tail. Adult males and females are roughly the same size, reaching lengths up to 13 feet (4 m) and weight 1,100 lbs (500 kg). They have a large, rounded head with a blunted beak. The dorsal fin is tall and sickle-shaped. As the dolphin ages, its coloration will change dramatically. Younger individuals are black, while older dolphins range between gray, brown and white. Their skin often appears mottled due to heavy scarring caused by by other dolphins raking their teeth across the skin during play or mating. Additional injuries can be caused by squid and Cookie-Cutter Sharks. Interestingly, the Risso's Dolphin has no teeth in its upper jaw.

The Risso's Dolphin does not congregate in large numbers like other dolphin species. Often they will live solitary lives or in small pods of no more than 30 individuals. They engage in a variety of behaviors when surfacing, including spyhopping and lobtailing. Their food sources include anchovies, krill, squid, octopus and cuttlefish.

Range and Habitat

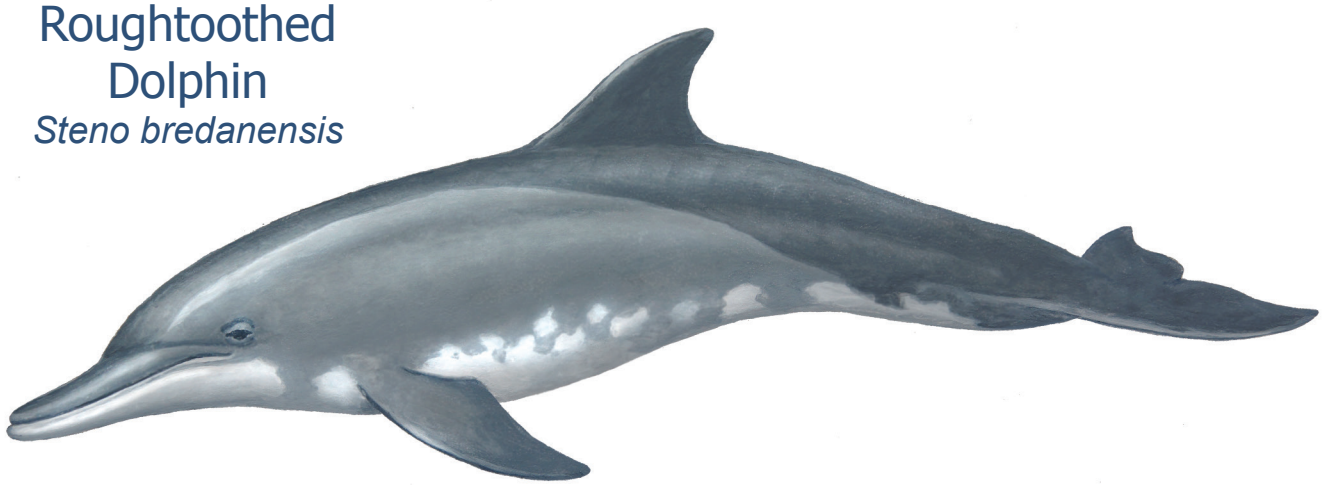
Populations of Risso's Dolphins can be found in U.S. waters around the Hawaiian islands, the West Coast, the northern Gulf of Mexico and the north Atlantic seaboard. This dolphin prefers the open sea and may be more numerous along or beyond the continental shelf.

Conservation Status

There is currently insufficient data to assess the global health of this species, but they are generally considered common in U.S. water. The California / Oregon / Washington stock is estimated to number up to 16,000 animals. Like all cetaceans, the Risso's Dolphin is protected from hunting by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Roughtoothed Dolphin

Steno bredanensis



This large dolphin is common in deep tropical and subtropical waters around the world. It has a long, pronounced rostrum similar to that of the Common Bottlenosed Dolphin. The body is mostly light gray with a darker cape-like band, which runs from the dorsal fin down to the flukes. The belly is white or very light gray and speckled along the edges. The flippers are small and set farther back on the body than in other dolphin species. As the name implies, their teeth are covered in faint, irregular ridges. Adults can grow over 9 feet in length and may weigh as much as 350 lbs. (158.7 kg).

Roughtoothed Dolphins live in pods of up to twenty biologically related animals. Although sociable, they are also more lethargic in their movements. They will occasionally bow-ride boats or perform acrobatics at the surface of the water. They may also socialize with other cetaceans, including Common Bottlenose Dolphins, Spinner Dolphins and Pilot Whales. They feed on a variety of fish and cephalopods.

Range and Habitat

Deep tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Their highest concentration is in the eastern Pacific from California down to the northern tip of South America. There is an additional population in U.S. waters located around the Hawaiian Islands. They are rare in Oregon waters.

Conservation Status

Unlike larger cetaceans, the Roughtoothed Dolphin has been only minimally impacted by humans. This animal was never widely hunted and its major threats include water-borne pollutants and accidental by-catch in fishing nets. Although they are considered common, they have not been widely studied so information on their population and life history remains incomplete.

Sei Whale

Balaenoptera borealis

The Sei Whale is the third largest rorqual species behind the Blue Whale and the Fin Whale. Like other rorquals, the Sei Whale uses hundreds of heavy plates of baleen attached to its upper jaw to filter krill and other tiny crustaceans out of sea water. Large, deeply-grooved folds of skin run from beneath the whale's jaw to mid-body. These folds allow the Sei Whale to greatly expand its jaw and engulf huge amounts of water for filtration. It is estimated they will extract two tons (907 kg) of food from the water every day.

The whale has a pointed rostrum and a small dorsal fin which is located two-thirds of the way down its back. Its skin is generally dark gray and heavily scarred. Adult whales in the North Pacific will measure up to 45 feet (13.7 m) for males and 49 feet (15 m) for females. Sei Whales in other parts of the world may grow up to 64 feet (19.5 m). Despite their enormous proportions, they are the fastest of all cetaceans and have been clocked swimming as fast as 31 mph (50 kph). Due to their size and speed, the Sei Whale has few natural predators outside of Orcas which may hunt them in groups.

Range and Habitat

Sei Whales have an extremely large range and are found in nearly every part of every ocean on Earth. They prefer subtropical and subpolar waters and may be found swimming along the edge of the continental shelf where food is plentiful. During the winter, it may migrate to warmer areas to mate and rear its young.

Conservation Status

Endangered. The Sei Whale's population was devastated by commercial whaling starting in the late nineteenth century. In the North Pacific Ocean alone, it is estimated over 72,000 whales were hunted in just sixty-five years. The whale is now protected from hunting by international law, although Japan still hunts this species. A 2008 census of the whale put its global population at approximately a quarter million individuals, or one-fourth its pre-whaling numbers. There are approximately 8,600 Sei Whales in the North Pacific Ocean.

Short-beaked Common Dolphin

Delphinus delphis

Although not as well known as similar species, the Short-Beaked Common Dolphin is the one most likely to be seen in Oregon waters. Their appearance is highly distinctive and has made them a favorite subject of artists going as far back as the ancient Minoans. The animal is light gray along its back but has a V-shaped swath of color starting just below the dorsal fin. A band of pale yellow extends toward the eye with a white ventral patch underneath. This gives the dolphin a beautiful tri-color look which becomes brighter as the animal matures.

Like all dolphins and porpoises, the Short-Beaked Common Dolphin shares a genetic and natural history with much larger whale species like Orcas, Grays and Humpbacks. It's one of the smaller species in Oregon waters, with a typical adult measuring about 9 feet (2.7 m) in length and calves being born at about 3 feet (0.9 m). A highly social animal, these dolphins often congregate in large pods, sometimes numbering in the thousands.

The Long-Beaked Common Dolphin is another species of the common dolphin.

Range and Habitat

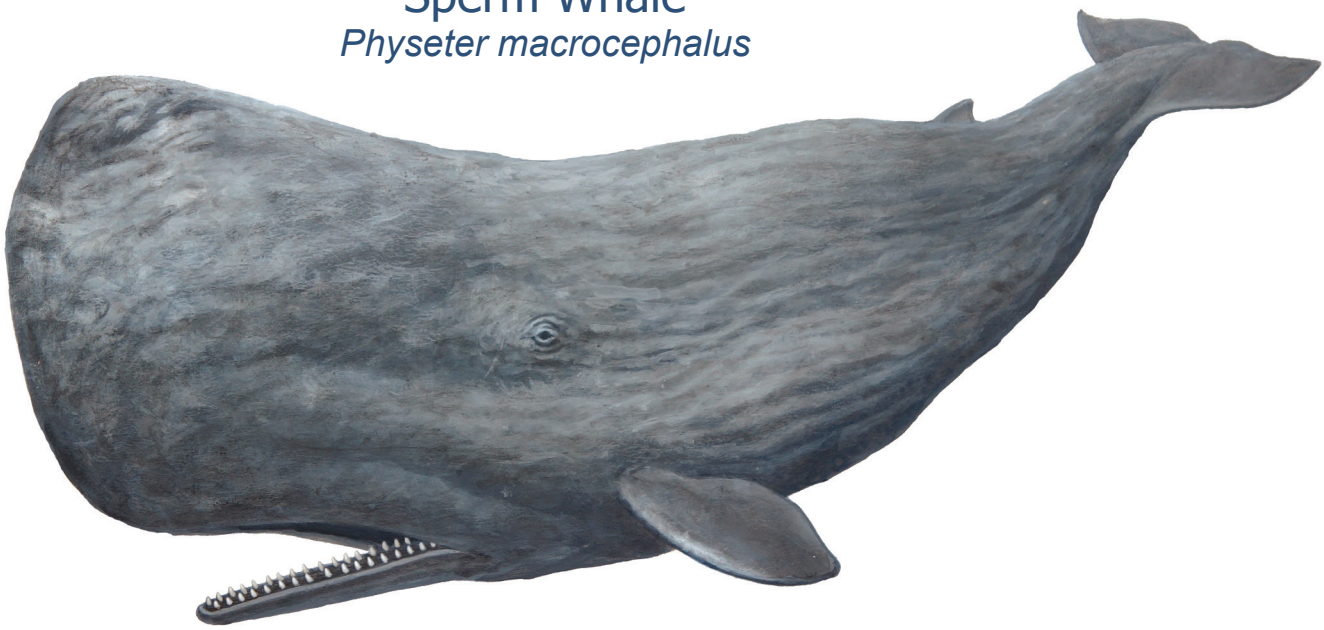
The dolphin prefers tropical and cool temperate waters along the continental shelf and in the open ocean. It is common in the waters off California, Oregon and Washington.

Conservation Status

Common. All whales are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Sperm Whale

Physeter macrocephalus



The Sperm Whale is the largest toothed whale on Earth and perhaps one of the most recognizable. The animal was made legendary as the almost supernatural antagonist of Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's classic novel, Moby Dick. The novel also documented an important time in the whale's natural history – the height of the whale-hunting industry in the United States and Europe when many of the ocean's cetaceans were driven to the brink of extinction. The chief commodity of whaling was the animal's blubber (fat) which was used in the production of oil, candles, cosmetics and soap. Whaling continued to be big industry up until sixty years ago when many of the products obtained from whales either fell out of fashion or could be created synthetically.

The Sperm Whale can be identified by its large, blunted head and small lower jaw. The inside of the mouth is lined with a single line of cone-shaped teeth. These teeth can weigh up to two pounds (0.9 kg) each. It is not clear whether the teeth are used for capturing food or in mating rituals. The skin of the whale is usually a gray-brown color and becomes increasingly wrinkled after the head and down the length of the body. These whales can grow to mammoth sizes. The largest was claimed to be 85 feet long (26 meters). (This same animal was said to have destroyed the whaling vessel, Essex, in 1820. This real-life incident inspired Herman Melville to write Moby Dick.)

The animal's size enables it to make very deep, prolonged dives. Sperm Whales can remain submerged for up to fifty minutes as they hunt deep-water squid. Although swimming through lightless areas, sophisticated echolocation allows them to track prey in a manner similar to sonar detecting underwater objects.

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Range and Habitat

Sperm Whales can be found in every major ocean on Earth at a variety of latitudes. They normally travel in extended family groups called “pods.” These pods consist mostly of females and calves, with adult males often attending to several groups simultaneously. They are common to Oregon waters throughout most of the year except when they migrate south between December and February.
Conservation Status

Conservation Status

Endangered. Sperm Whales were hunted worldwide during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century; and again during the mid-twentieth century. The effect on their population was devastating. Before the hunts, over a million Sperm Whales cruised the oceans. Their numbers are now estimated at 360,000 worldwide. They are currently protected by United States law and international agreement, but rogue whaling nations continue to kill these animals in yearly hunts. Marine debris and discarded fishing nets also present a real danger to the species and account for some mortality.