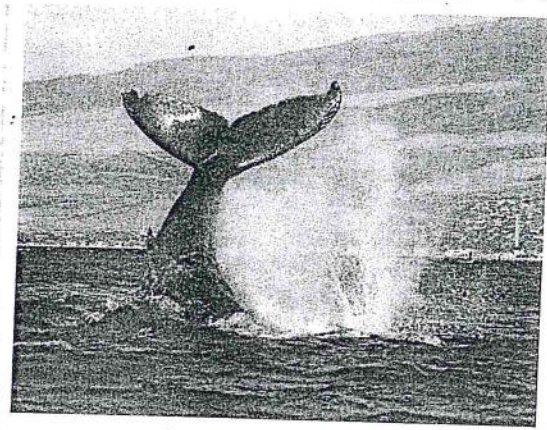


# Whales fact file

If you're interested in animals you will love learning about whales: they are unique and extraordinary creatures, and we have more in common with them than you might imagine...

## Types

Whales, like us, are mammals. They number around 80 different species, and belong to the animal order *cetecea*, which can be further divided into *baleen* whales and *toothed* whales. Toothed whales outnumber baleens in species. Their teeth are for grabbing and chewing prey, attack and defence, or exhibiting dominance. Cooperating in groups or pods, they hunt, migrate and rear young together. Baleen whales are usually superior in size, with two blowholes rather than one and a baleen palate instead of teeth. They swim with their mouths agape, filter feeding by expelling the water through their gills and retaining food inside their baleen bristles. Their annual migration to warm-water breeding grounds often requires long journeys from cold-water feeding grounds.



## How are whales like other mammals?

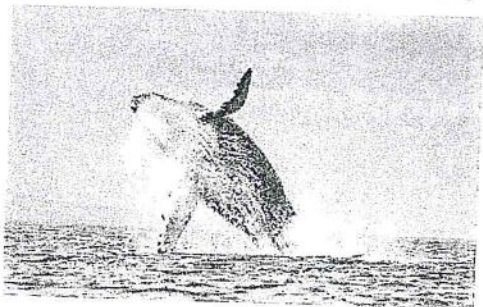
- They use lungs to breathe air.
- They are warm-blooded.
- They produce milk to feed their young.
- They have some hair.

## How are whales special?

- A layer of blubber lies under their skin.
- They breathe through a blowhole on their head.
- Their bodies have the streamlined form of a fish.
- They have paddle-shaped forelimbs or flippers.

## Habitat and diet

Whales can be found in oceans throughout the world, usually dictated by their species. Their diets very much depend on their environments, ranging from microscopic plankton (eaten in vast quantities) to large marine animals.



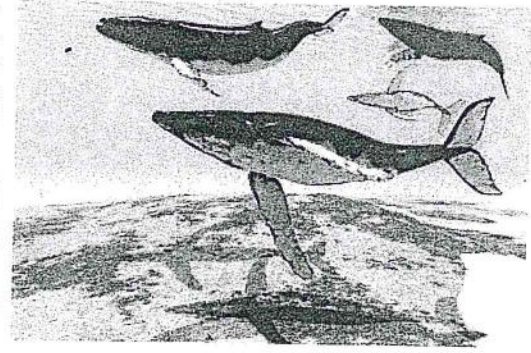
## Behaviour

Whales are usually quite active in the water. Most whales *breach* out of the water and some slap their tails on the surface, perhaps to warn one another of local danger. They communicate through loud, singing sounds, sometimes audible miles away. Travel may be solitary or in pods during annual migration to breeding grounds.

## Threats

The growth of the whaling industry over the last few centuries saw whales hunted for oil and food, leaving many species such as Blue Whales endangered. The negative depiction of the ferocious fictional whale, *Moby Dick*, encouraged human antipathy.

Modern reforms and changed public attitudes have ended the whaling industry in most countries, but nevertheless some countries still continue their annual whale hunts. Further threats come from beaching; contaminated and polluted waters; and reduced populations of krill due to climate change raising temperatures in the Antarctic Ocean. (Krill is a small crustacean, the main food source for some whale species.)



## Breaching

Whales sometimes leap out of the water, slapping the water loudly when coming down. Breaching may be for play, to loosen skin parasites or for communication.

## Echolocation

Whales use sound to help them navigate and find things, usually high-pitched clicks that bounce off objects. The returning echo lets them gauge proximity, shape, size and texture.

## Beaching

Whales sometimes come on to land, and can die if they become beached. They can beach in large numbers. No one quite knows why, though it is thought that their hearing has become damaged or confused.

## Blubber

Blubber is an ingenious layer of insulating fat. It keeps the whale's temperature stable, stores food energy, and helps it to stay afloat; it ranges from 5cm thick (grey whales) to 30cm thick (blue whales).