

Whaling

Whaling is the hunting of whales. It was responsible for the death of over two million whales in the 20th century and still continues today.

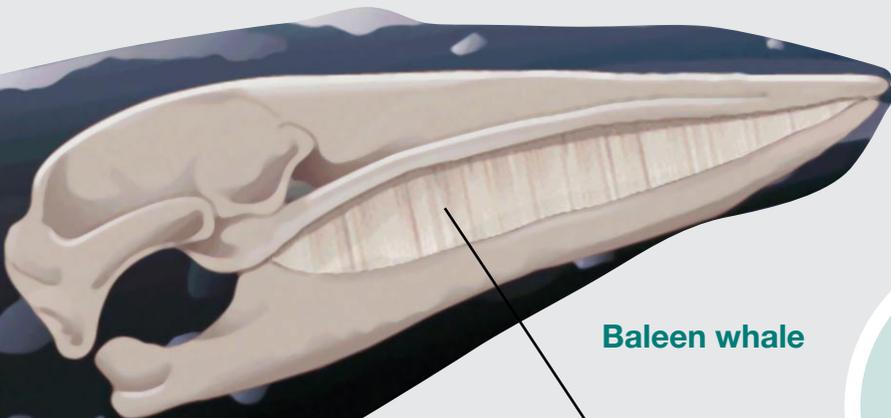
What is a whale?

A whale is a marine mammal. It is a warm-blooded, air-breathing animal that gives birth to live young and is part of the cetacean family. Cetacean is the collective term for whales, dolphins and porpoises; there are over 80 species in the world.

Whales are separated into two categories (called suborders):

Baleen whales (Latin name: *Mysticeti*)

Baleen whales are filter-feeders, using 'baleen plates' as a sieve to filter food from the water. This suborder includes the humpback whale and blue whale. The blue whale is the largest animal to have ever lived.



Baleen whale

Baleen

Toothed whales (Latin name: *Odontoceti*)

Toothed whales have teeth. Instead of filtering their food, they hunt fish, squid and sometimes other marine mammals. This suborder includes all porpoises and dolphins as well as killer whales and sperm whales.

Social animals

Whales show a wide range of different behaviours, social organisations and communication methods which vary greatly between species. Many whales, particularly juveniles, are inquisitive and playful and can frequently be observed interacting with boats and divers as well as with one another.

Some species, particularly toothed whales, form groups where there are close bonds between individuals and even cooperative hunting. Whales may stay in these groups for many years or even their whole lifetime.

Baleen whales tend to lead a more solitary existence, although they gather in groups for feeding and breeding. Although they appear solitary, baleen whales use sound to communicate with one another over great distances. The songs of humpback whales are thought to form an important part of their social systems and communities.

Depending on species, calves can remain with their mothers for up to 18 months. Females are protective of their young, actively steering them away from threats and defending them against predators.

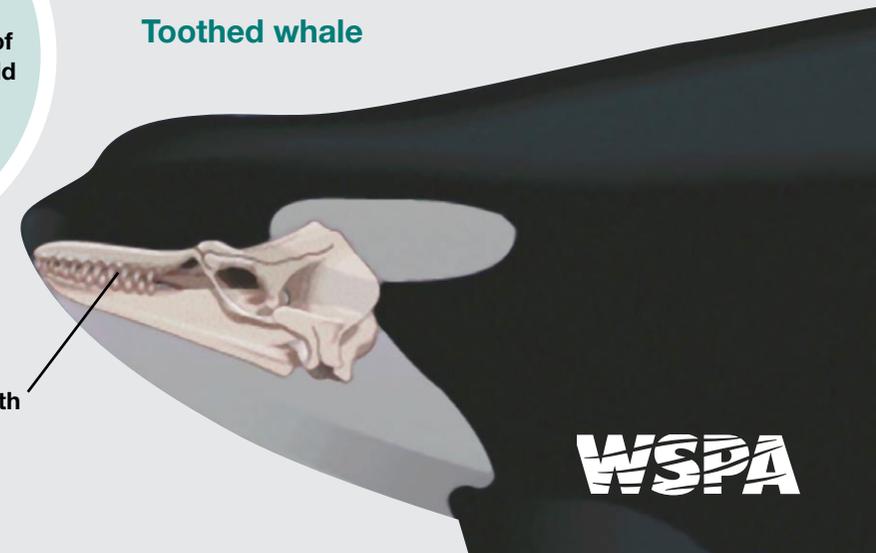
Did you know?

At 16,000km, humpback whales undertake the longest annual migration of any mammal from their cold water feeding grounds to warmer tropical waters to breed and give birth.

Did you know?

Whales can feel pain, fear and distress. Animals that have this ability are called 'sentient'.

Toothed whale



Teeth

Why are whales hunted?

Whales have been hunted for their meat and other products, such as oil and blubber, for thousands of years. Blubber (fat) was turned into oil which was used for lighting, mechanical lubrication or in cosmetic products like soap. Today the meat and blubber from all whaling operations is used for human consumption although these days only a few communities of indigenous people actually rely on whale meat to survive.

The current demand for whale meat and other products is a lot less than it used to be. Whale meat is sold commercially in Norway, Japan and Iceland but it is consumed only by small sections of the population. This has resulted in unused stockpiles of frozen, excess meat, while at the same time whales are still being killed and adding to this surplus supply. This is particularly the case in Japan.

The main types of whaling conducted today are **commercial whaling**, **aboriginal subsistence whaling** and **scientific whaling**.



Killing Machine: a whaling harpoon at The Whale Museum in Ulsan, Korea

Did you know?

Norway has killed over 8,100 whales since the whaling ban began, including 534 minke whales in 2008 alone.

Commercial whaling

- Commercial whaling is the hunting of whales where the products are sold for financial gain.
- Norway and Iceland both hunt whales commercially.

Aboriginal subsistence whaling

- This is the hunting of whales for local consumption, carried out by or on behalf of indigenous people who rely on whaling to meet their nutritional needs.
- The four countries that still carry out aboriginal subsistence whaling of large whales are the USA, Greenland, Russia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines.
- The methods used to kill whales in these hunts are less efficient than those used by commercial whalers. Data reported from these hunts shows that whales often take longer to die and are even less likely to die straight away.

Scientific whaling

- Also known as 'special permit whaling', this type of hunt is carried out by Japan. The meat resulting from this 'scientific research' is sold commercially.
- Many scientists argue that there is no valid research need for scientific whaling programmes that result in the death of the whale. Many countries have said Japan's lethal 'scientific' programmes are unnecessary and have asked Japan to stop.



No Demand: Excess supplies of whale meat go unused.

How are whales hunted?

Whaling boats equipped with harpoons look for whales at sea. Most commonly, they will use a harpoon with an explosive grenade at the tip, called a 'penthrite harpoon'. This is designed to explode inside the whale's body.

While most countries now have regulations and legislation to protect and control the welfare of farm animals at the time of slaughter, these laws do not extend to include whales. Their welfare during a hunt is not protected by any adequate legal guidelines.

How hunts affect whale welfare

Both the whales and the water are constantly moving, making it difficult for whalers to aim an accurate and lethal harpoon shot. Inaccurate shots, combined with the sheer size and body mass of whales, make it impossible to ensure a swift and humane death.

Instead of killing the whale instantly, the harpoon frequently causes massive shock, blood loss and internal injuries. On average, it takes a harpooned whale between two to three minutes to die, although some whales have been reported as taking over an hour to die.

- Norway's whalers reported that one in five whales (20%) failed to die instantaneously during 2002.
- Japan reported that almost 60% of whales their ships hunted failed to die as soon as they were shot in 2002/3.

In order to dive underwater for extended periods, whales are able to shut down the blood supply to all but their essential organs, including the brain. This may allow them to maintain consciousness following significant blood loss and despite appearing to be dead to humans.

Did you know?

In 2009 up to 2,500 great whales will be slaughtered and their meat sold commercially in shops and restaurants.

This natural ability means many more whales may suffer prolonged, agonizing deaths than reported by whaling countries.

Some whales are struck but not killed during hunts. They may die a slow death from their wounds, or be unable to dive, feed or breed properly as a result of their injuries.

Does anyone manage the world's whaling?

There is an established international body that is responsible for the conservation and management of the world's whales.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was set up 1946. By 2008, 75 countries – both pro- and anti- whaling – had joined this committee of member governments. Together member nations of the IWC and its scientists review whale populations all over the world, set hunting quotas and oversee whaling activities where they take place. The IWC also co-ordinates and funds research into the threats that whales face.

Visit the IWC website at www.iwcoffice.org for more information on the Commission and see which countries are members.

The powers of the IWC

In 1982 IWC members agreed on temporary ban (a 'moratorium') on commercial whaling. This came into force in 1986.

The moratorium remains in place today. Pro-whaling countries continue to push for it to be lifted while anti-whaling nations argue it must be maintained and strengthened.

Did you know?

In 2008 Japan set out to kill 1,415 great whales for 'scientific research'. The IWC believes the current lethal 'scientific' programmes are unnecessary and has called on Japan to stop this kind of whaling 15 times in the last 20 years.



Painful death: Norwegian whaler "Brandsholmboen" and a harpooned Minke whale kill in Hamningberg.

If there is a ban, why does whaling still take place?

Despite the introduction of the moratorium, over 30,000 great whales have been killed since the ban came into force in 1986.

In addition, tens of thousands of small whales, dolphins, and porpoises are killed annually worldwide in hunting activities not regulated by the IWC.

Three countries have been responsible for the vast majority of whaling since the IWC ban was introduced.

Did you know?

In 2007 the government of Iceland cited lack of demand for whale meat as the reason why the country stopped whaling. Yet in 2008 they allowed up to 40 minke whales to be killed in Icelandic commercial hunts.

Japan, Iceland, and Norway

- Japan carries out 'scientific whaling'. A legal loophole in the IWC ban allows any nation to allocate itself a quota of whales in the name of scientific research. However, the meat is still sold commercially and many countries and non-governmental organisations like WSPA argue that the necessary research could be carried out without killing whales.
- Norway and Iceland have officially lodged 'objections' to the IWC moratorium and continue their commercial whaling.
- In 2006 Japan, Norway and Iceland stopped providing whale welfare data – such as how long it takes whales to die during hunts – to the IWC. Anti-whaling member countries believe this decision severely limits the IWC's ability to monitor and improve the humaneness of hunts.
- All three countries have repeatedly announced their long-term intention to continue whaling. They have also expressed interest in resuming international trade in whale products



What other threats do whales face?

As well as whaling, a number of environmental threats affect whales. These include: pollution, entanglement in fishing nets (called 'by-catch'), climate change, global over-fishing (which affects the whales' food supply), collisions with ships, habitat loss and noise pollution (which is thought to affect whales' diving patterns and navigation and may lead to strandings as well as hearing damage).

Whaling and other threats have led to at least five of the 13 species of great whales being listed as endangered.

Are there any alternatives to whaling?

These days commercial whaling is not necessary for our food supply. Instead, people can benefit from whales by enjoying watching them in the wild.

Every year over 10 million people worldwide go on whale watching trips, a growing industry which annually generates 1.25 billion US dollars, making it far more profitable than whaling. Whale watching occurs in over 90 different countries and provides jobs and increases tourism in many coastal communities. It also provides an opportunity for important scientific research to take place, helping human beings to find out more about how these unique and intelligent creatures behave and live.

Close bonds: Humpback mother and calf

As with any wildlife watching, whale watching must be carefully managed to ensure that it does not put the animals under stress or affect their natural behaviours. For example, whale watching boats should keep the correct distance and speed around whales, and should not chase or approach whales head-on.

How does WSPA work on whaling?

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) works to improve and protect whale welfare.

- We use diplomacy and public support to encourage the IWC to carefully consider whale welfare at their annual meetings.
- We support and encourage animal welfare organisations, in both pro- and anti-whaling countries, to campaign against whaling on welfare grounds.
- We produce reports to back up our welfare claims and perspective with good science.
- We founded the Whalewatch network. This is a group of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) united by an opposition to whaling on welfare grounds. By sharing information and working together we are better able to promote the importance of whale welfare across the globe.

Our work is based on WSPA's whaling policy:

- WSPA believes that there is no humane way to kill whales at sea.

The exploding harpoon is an inhumane weapon and there are numerous uncontrollable factors (such as visibility, sea state and animal behaviour) which make it impossible to ensure an instant, humane kill.

- Whales face a multitude of threats to their survival in the 21st century. WSPA is asking the IWC to focus its attention on the long-term protection and recovery of whale populations, rather than concentrating on whaling.
- WSPA also believes that whale watching is the only humane and sustainable use of whales in the 21st century. We are calling for the IWC to encourage and manage the continued growth of the whale watching industry, giving people the opportunity to see and appreciate these fascinating animals and helping us to understand more about their lives.

More information

To find out more about whaling, whales, and how you can get involved, visit:

www.wspa-international.org/wspaswork/whaling
www.whalewatch.org

You can watch WSPA's five minute underwater film, *The Hidden Life of Whales*, at www.wspa-international.org/whaling

For further information about the International Whaling Commission (IWC), including which countries are members visit the IWC website: www.iwcoffice.org