

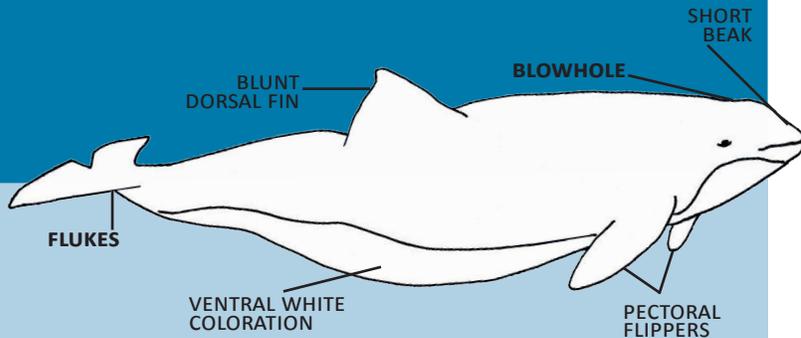
VOCABULARY

BLOWHOLE: the hole at the top of a porpoise's head through which the animal breathes air

FLUKE: the tail; by moving it up and down, the porpoise is able to swim forward

GESTATION: the carrying of an unborn animal inside a female's body; pregnancy

POD: a group of porpoises that travel together



PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION As one of the smallest marine mammals, adults are about 5-5.5 feet long and weigh 135-170 pounds. Females are slightly larger than males. Harbor porpoises have small, robust bodies with short, blunt beaks and small, paddle-like pectoral fins. Midway along the back, they have a blunt, triangular dorsal fin. The top is dark gray with white on the belly and throat.

DIET Harbor porpoises feed mostly on small schooling fish, particularly herring and capelin. In some areas, they also eat squid and crustaceans.

LIFE HISTORY Unlike other marine mammals, they generally do not jump at the surface. When surfacing for air, they roll from beak to fluke without splashing. Females become sexually mature at 3-4 years of age and generally give birth to one calf every year. **Gestation** lasts 10-11 months, and calves nurse for 8-12 months. On average, harbor porpoises live 24 years and travel in **pods** of 2-5 animals.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION Harbor porpoises inhabit temperate and subarctic waters and are found on both coasts of North America. On the east coast, they range from West Greenland to North Carolina. They are commonly found in bays, estuaries and harbors, and tend to stay near coastal waters.

LOCAL INFORMATION In Maryland, they are often found in the Chesapeake Bay and other estuaries within its watershed from late winter-spring.

STATUS Protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, their primary threat is bycatch—the incidental capture in fishing gear, specifically gillnets and trawls.

HARBOR PORPOISE

(Phocoena phocoena)

CLASS: Mammalia
ORDER: Cetacea
FAMILY: Phocoenidae
GENIUS: *Phocoena*
SPECIES: *phocoena*



The scientific name for Harbor Porpoises, *Phocoena phocoena*, is derived from the Latin word for pig (porcus). They are sometimes referred to as “puffer pigs” by fishermen.



The most noticeable difference between a harbor porpoise and a dolphin is its blunt-nosed head.



Harbor porpoises are rarely seen leaping out of the water in the wild. However, this photo distinctly shows the short beak, blunt triangular dorsal fin and short pectoral fins.

TO REPORT A STRANDED MARINE MAMMAL OR SEA TURTLE, CALL THE 24-HOUR HOTLINE AT 800-628-9944



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