

VOCABULARY

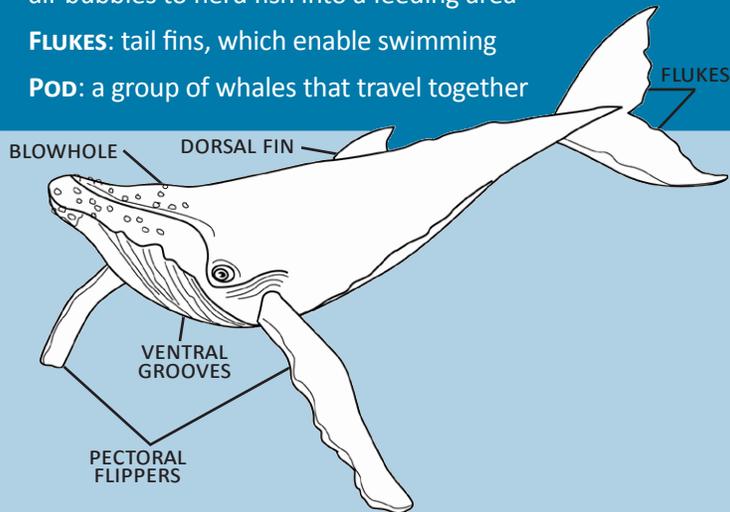
BALEEN: composed of the same material as human hair, attached to a whale's jaw to trap food

BLOWHOLE: the hole at the top of a the head through which the whale breathes air

BUBBLE-NETTING: a hunting technique in which whales use air bubbles to herd fish into a feeding area

FLUKES: tail fins, which enable swimming

POD: a group of whales that travel together



PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION Humpbacks are baleen whales with long pectoral fins. They are primarily black with white fins and bellies. Females are typically larger and can reach 60 feet long.

DIET Baleen filters mouthfuls of seawater for tiny crustaceans, fish and plankton. Adults filter about 3,000 pounds of food per day. Groups often **bubble-net** to force large volumes of fish into small areas.

LIFE HISTORY These whales reach sexual maturity between 6-8 years of age. Mating behaviors include **fluke** thrashing and vocalizations of lengthy, complex songs heard up to 20 miles away. Females bear one calf every 2-3 years, which can weigh up to a ton at birth. They can live 20-40 years.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION Humpbacks inhabit every ocean. They migrate north for the summer to feed and south for the winter to give birth. The record migration is a 5,160-mile journey from Costa Rica to Antarctica.

LOCAL INFORMATION They are found off the mid-Atlantic coast as they migrate from feeding to calving grounds. Only a few strandings are reported each year in Maryland, usually in the spring and mostly on the coast. However, they have been seen in the Chesapeake Bay.

STATUS Humpbacks are endangered throughout their range as defined by the Endangered Species Act. Threats include entanglement, ship strikes, harassment, habitat impacts, and, in other parts of the world, harvest.

HUMPBACK WHALE

(Megaptera novaeangliae)

CLASS: Mammalia

ORDER: Cetacea

FAMILY: Balaenopteridae

GENIUS: *Megaptera*

SPECIES: *novaeangliae*



Humpbacks are among whale-watchers' favorites due to their performances that include breaching—or jumping out of the water—and slapping the surface with their fins and flukes.



The white coloration on flukes is specific to each whale, similar to the uniqueness of each human fingerprint.



Grooves under the throat expand the capacity of the mouth during feeding.

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



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