



Blue whale

Blue whale

Balaenoptera musculus [size: to 100 ft. (30.5 m)]

Largest of all living animals, the 160-ton blue whale consumes some fairly-small prey. Lunging open-mouthed at schools of shrimplike krill, this baleen whale can engulf and strain four tons of food daily.

The 24-foot long newborn blue whale is an impressive eater, too. Drinking 130 gallons of milk a day, the calf can double its weight in one week.



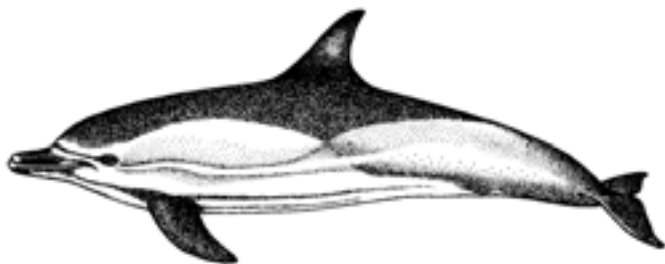
California sea lion

California sea lion

Zalophus californianus [size: to 7.5 ft. (2.3 m)]

Diving 800 feet deep, the sea lion paddles with its strong front limbs and steers with its rear flippers. On land, it rotates the hind flippers forward to walk on all fours.

At mating time, the male sea lion barks and bellows to establish his territory and gather a harem of females. Never giving ground, not even to eat, the bull defends his turf from male intruders.



Common dolphin

Common dolphin

Delphinus delphis [size: to 8.5 ft. (2.6 m)]

These slender dolphins live and travel in huge groups that can cover several square miles. Even in pods of a hundred or more, the dolphins protect each other. When one is injured, the others take turns supporting it so it doesn't drown.

In some countries, people still hunt and eat dolphins. Thousands more die each year, accidentally caught in fish nets.



Dall's porpoise

Dall's porpoise

Phocoenoides dalli [size: to 7 ft. (2.1 m)]

This stocky porpoise has a small dorsal fin and tiny flippers, but it's a spectacular swimmer. Moving like a hydroplane, it races through the water, leaving behind a "rooster tail" of spray when it surfaces for air.

For food, the Dall's porpoise favors deep sea fishing. It roams out beyond the continental shelf to hunt for squids, crustaceans and fishes.



Fin whale

Fin whale

Balaenoptera physalis [size: to 88 ft. (27 m)]

The world's second largest animal, the fin whale can cruise the open ocean at speeds of 35 miles an hour. Most other whales can't swim so fast for extended periods.

Uneven coloring makes the fin whale unique among all whales; its lower jaw is white on the right and black on the left. Dark and light patterns on its body may disguise the fin whale as it hunts fishes.



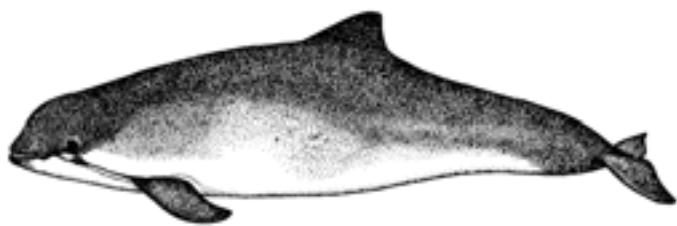
Gray whale

Gray whale

Eschrichtius robustus [size: to 50 ft. (15 m)]

Gray whales make the longest migration of any mammal, swimming 12,000 miles each year. In fall, they head south to their breeding lagoons in Baja California; in spring, they return north to feed in the Bering Sea.

Unlike other baleen whales, the gray whale eats bottom-living crustaceans. The whale sucks in a mouthful of mud and strains it through the baleen to remove the prey.



Harbor porpoise

Harbor porpoise

Phocoena phocoena [size: to 6 ft. (1.8 m)]

The stocky harbor porpoise lives near shore in harbors, bays and river mouths. Wary of boats, it won't cruise alongside them, preferring to swim quietly on the surface.

Harbor porpoises work cooperatively to hunt squids and fishes. The porpoises herd a school of fish into a tight ball, then each porpoise grabs a fish head-first and swallows it whole.



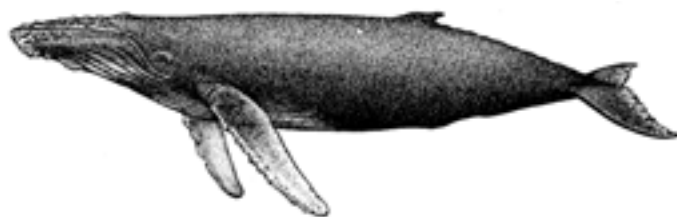
Harbor seal

Harbor seal

Phoca vitulina [size: to 5 ft. (1.5 m)]

A harbor seal can't "walk" on land the way a sea lion can. On shore, the harbor seal has to inch along awkwardly on its belly, but in water, it's a graceful swimmer, powered by its webbed hind flippers.

Harbor seals don't migrate far from home. They hunt fishes, squids and octopuses near shore, using their large eyes and sensitive whiskers to help them locate prey.



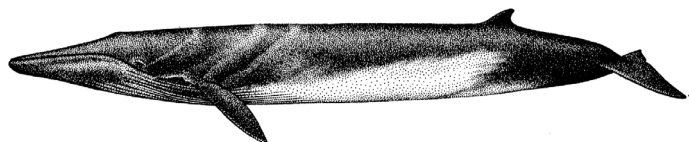
Humpback whale

Humpback whale

Megaptera novaeangliae [size: to 51 ft. (15.6 m)]

Humpback whales travel between their Arctic feeding grounds and tropical breeding grounds. Some migrate to Hawaii and some to Mexico; a few visit both sites in different years.

In the breeding areas, the males display their great vocal range with songs that may warn off other males or attract females. As they sing, the whales gradually alter their song, so each year it's a different melody.



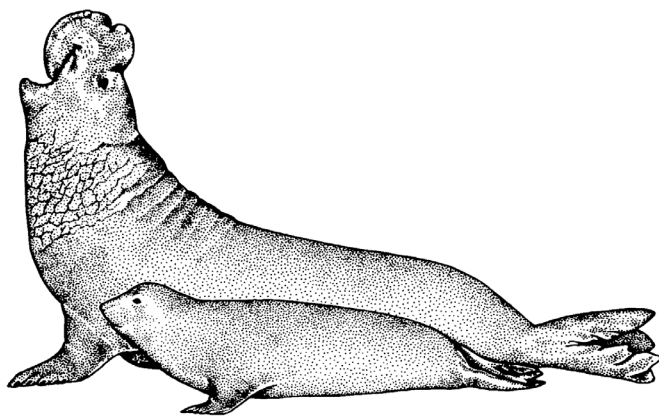
Minke Whale

Minke whale

Balaenoptera acutorostrata [size: to 35 ft. (10.7 m)]

Although it's as long as a bus, the minke whale is the smallest of the baleen whales. As agile as a porpoise, it can leap from the water in a graceful arc or ride the bow wave of a passing ship.

Alone or with a companion, the minke whale hunts squids, fishes and krill. The whale jumps and splashes to gather its prey in a ball, then lunges in to scoop up the cluster.



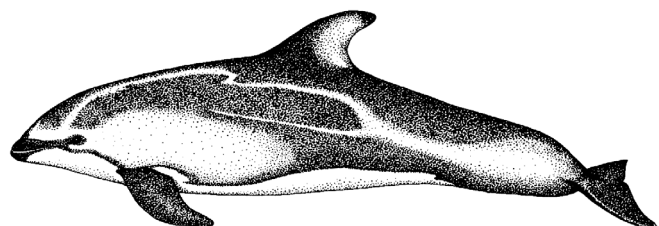
Northern elephant seal

Northern elephant seal

Mirounga angustirostris [size: to 19.5 ft. (5.9 m)]

Once hunted to near-extinction, elephant seals are now breeding successfully again. At mating time, they move ashore, the males battling for position. With snorts of warning, the dominant bulls defend their females against rival males.

After breeding, the elephant seals return to the sea to feed. Diving deeper than 2,700 feet, they hunt deep water fishes and squids.



Pacific white-sided dolphin

Pacific white-sided dolphin

Lagenorhynchus obliquidens [size: to 7 ft. (2.1 m)]

Resident pods of hundreds of white-sided dolphins streak through Monterey Bay. They swim in formation with other dolphins and sea lions, sometimes leaping from the water in spirited somersaults.

Each dolphin is unique, from the patterns on its body to the noises it makes. High-pitched squeaks, clicks and whistles help it communicate with its family pod.



Sea Otter

Sea otter

Enhydra lutris [size: to 5.5 ft. (1.7 m)]

For warmth, the sea otter relies on its thick fur coat with 600,000 hairs per square inch. The otter spends nearly half its waking hours grooming its fur coat to keep it waterproof.

The otter dives for shellfish, then eats lying on its back at the surface. Because it consumes abalones and crabs, the otter sometimes competes with people for food.



Sei whale

Sei whale

Balaenoptera borealis [size: to 60 ft. (18.5 m)]

Sei whales cruise the oceans from polar regions to the tropics. Unlike other baleen whales, they don't have predictable migration routes but seem to follow their prey, trailing the northward fish migrations.

Swimming near the surface, the whale skims small invertebrates from the sea. As it feeds, the whale's throat pleats expand like an accordion to hold tons of water and prey.



Sperm whale

Sperm whale

Physeter macrocephalus [size: to 62 ft. (18.9 m)]

Diving a mile or more below the surface, the sperm whale makes clicking noises to echolocate for prey. When it finds a shark or giant squid, the whale stuns it with a blast of sound and swallows it whole.

For years, whalers hunted this whale for the milk-colored oil that fills its huge square head. No one knows what the oil is for; perhaps it helps the whale focus sounds.