

HUMPBACK WHALES



The **humpback whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) is a species of baleen whale. One of the larger rorqual species, adults range in length from 12–16 metres (39–52 ft) and weigh approximately 36,000 kilograms (79,000 lb). The humpback has a distinctive body shape, with unusually long pectoral fins and a knobby head.

Like other large whales, the humpback was and is a target for the whaling industry. Once hunted to the brink of extinction, its population fell by an estimated 90% before a moratorium was introduced in 1966. While stocks have since partially recovered, entanglement in fishing gear, collisions with ships, and noise pollution continue to impact the 80,000 humpbacks worldwide.

Interesting Facts:

- A humpback whale can easily be identified by its stocky body with an obvious hump and black dorsal coloring. The head and lower jaw are covered with knobs called tubercles, which are hair follicles, and are characteristic of the species.
- The fluked tail, which it lifts above the surface in some dive sequences, has wavy trailing edges
- The long black and white tail fin, which can be up to a third of body length, and the pectoral fins have unique patterns, which make individual whales identifiable.
- Humpbacks have 270 to 400 darkly colored baleen plates on each side of their mouths. The plates measure from a mere 18 inches (46 cm) in the front to approximately 3 feet (0.91 m) long in the back, behind the hinge. Ventral grooves run from the lower jaw to the umbilicus about halfway along the underside of the whale.
- The stubby dorsal fin is visible soon after the blow when the whale surfaces, but disappears by the time the flukes emerge.
- Humpbacks have a 3 metres (9.8 ft), heart-shaped to bushy blow, or exhalation of water through the blowholes. Because humpback whales breathe voluntarily, the whales possibly shut off only half of their brains when sleeping. Early whalers also noted blows from humpback adults to be 10–20 feet (3.0–6.1 m) high.
- Found in oceans and seas around the world, humpback whales typically migrate up to 25,000 kilometers (16,000 mi) each year.
- Humpbacks feed only in summer, in polar waters, and migrate to tropical or subtropical waters to breed and give birth in the winter. During the winter, humpbacks fast and live off their fat reserves.
- Their diet consists mostly of krill and small fish. Humpbacks have a diverse repertoire of feeding methods, including the bubble net feeding technique.
- Females reach sexual maturity at the age of five, achieving full adult size a little later. Males reach sexual maturity at approximately seven years of age. Humpback whale life spans range from 45–100 years.^[16] Fully grown, the males average 13–14 m (43–46 ft). Females are slightly larger at 15–16 m (49–52 ft)
- Newborn calves are roughly the length of their mother's head. At birth, calves measure 6 metres (20 ft) at 2 short tons (1.8 t) The mother, by comparison, is about 15 metres (49 ft). They nurse for approximately six months, then mix nursing and independent feeding for possibly six months more. Humpback milk is 50% fat and pink in color.