

WHALE



SPECIES WHALE

FACTS

Whales roam throughout all of the world's oceans, communicating with complex and mysterious sounds. Their sheer size amazes us: the blue whale can reach lengths of more than 100 feet and weigh up to 200 tons—as much as 33 elephants. Despite living in the water, whales breathe air. And like humans, they are warm-blooded mammals who nurse their young. A thick layer of fat called blubber insulates them from cold ocean waters.

WHY THEY MATTER

Whales are at the top of the food chain and have an important role in the overall health of the marine environment. Whales play a significant role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere; each great whale sequesters an estimated 33 tons of CO₂ on average, thus playing their part in the fight against climate change. Unfortunately, their large size and mythical aura does not protect them; six out of the 13 great whale species are classified as endangered or vulnerable, even after decades of protection. An estimated minimum of 300,000 whales and dolphins are killed each year as a result of fisheries bycatch, while others succumb to a myriad of threats including shipping and habitat loss.

THREATS

Despite a moratorium on commercial whaling and a ban on international trade of whale products, three countries—Iceland, Japan, and Norway—continue their commercial whale hunts. Over 1,000 whales a year are killed for such commercial purposes. The blue whale, the largest animal ever known to have existed, was almost exterminated in the 20th century due to commercial whaling.

Warming oceans and loss of sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic can affect the habitats and food of whales. Large patches of tiny plants and animals that they feed on will likely move or change in abundance as climate change alters seawater temperature, winds, and ocean currents. These changes can mean whales such as humpbacks and blues may have to migrate much further to reach feeding grounds, leaving them with less time to forage for food.

PROTECTION

WWF has been actively working to protect whales for 50 years. In 1984, we helped to convince the world to ban commercial whaling. WWF and our partners want to reduce the number of whales lost each year by demonstrating to shipping companies, fishing fleets, and governments that new tools and best practices can significantly reduce whale deaths and injury. WWF works to establish whale sanctuaries, help shift shipping lanes, and curtail seismic surveys that disrupt feeding grounds.

All information comes directly from the World Wildlife Fund Website

