

Baleen Whale ID



OUR OCEAN • GET OUTSIDE!

As you look out at the ocean you might spot something large moving in the water. It might be a whale! In order to determine a species of whale, we use a checklist. Where you are in the world determines what whale species you might see. In the Gulf of Maine, the most commonly seen whale species are Humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Finback (*Balaenoptera physalus*), Minke (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), and the North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*).

Step 1: Define any unusual or unique characteristics of the whale.



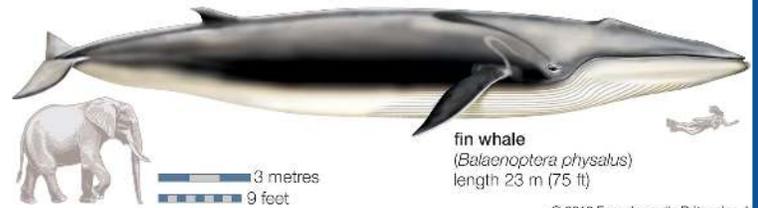
The long black and white pectoral fins of the humpback whale are a pretty easy give away.

Step 2: Estimate the size of the whale.

Now it may be tricky to distinguish size with only one whale present, but we can separate whales into two main groups, big and small. Whales greater than 40 feet (think a school bus) will be the Humpback (40-50 feet), Finback (70-80 feet), or North Atlantic Right Whale (50-60 feet). Anything smaller than 40 feet will most likely be a Minke whale (20-30 feet).

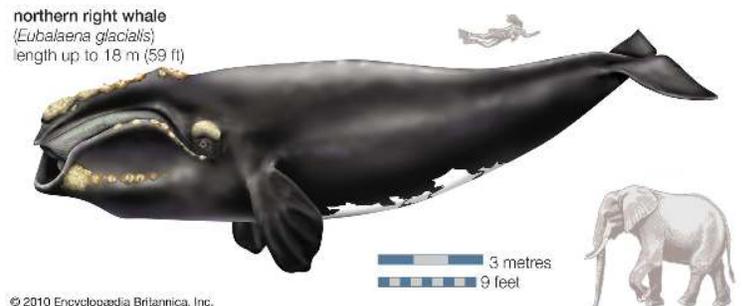


The smallest whales are the toothed whales, a group that includes orcas, dolphins and porpoises.



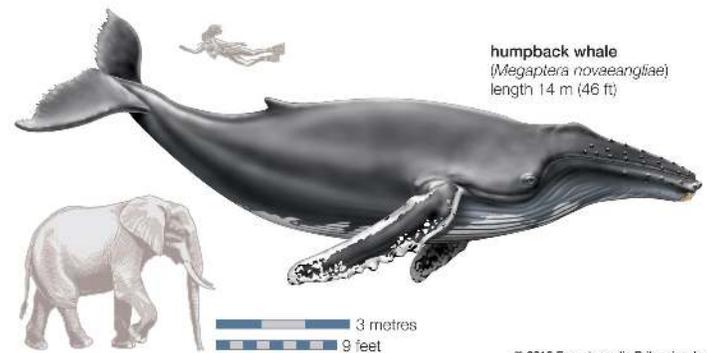
fin whale
(*Balaenoptera physalus*)
length 23 m (75 ft)

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northern right whale
(*Eubalaena glacialis*)
length up to 18 m (59 ft)

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humpback whale
(*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
length 14 m (46 ft)

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minke whale
(*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)
length up to 10 m (33 ft)

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Step 3: Look at the shape of the fin.

The shape of the dorsal fin can help you identify whales. If a fin is short and stunted, it's a humpback! If the fin is curved on a big back, it could be a finback whale!



Humpback whale



Finback whale

Right whales are unique!

Right whales are identified by their callosities (areas of raised tissue on their heads). Often mistaken for barnacles, these areas are white in color due to the Cyamids (whale lice) that live in these tissues.



North Atlantic Right whale

