

# WHALES

WHALES, along with dolphins and porpoises are mammals and make up the group called cetaceans (pronounced si-tay-shuns). There are more than 83 different species of whales but they can be divided into two main groups - toothed whales and baleen whales. Toothed whales e.g. killer whales, have triangle-shaped teeth which they use to catch prey whereas baleen whales e.g. fin whales, have baleen plates in their mouths instead of teeth. Toothed whales eat fish, squid, sharks or seals and baleen whales eat krill (these look like tiny shrimp).

A group of whales is called a pod and many of these migrate from one area to another during the year communicating with each other as they move using a series of clicks and whistles. They spend the summer feeding in the North or South Poles where there is a lot of sunlight for food to grow. In winter they move to warmer waters to feed and to give birth to their young. Whales give birth to a single calf every one to three years. The calf is inside the mother for 10 to 17 months before it is born (tail first). The mother immediately pushes it to the surface for air. It feeds on the mothers milk, which is rich in fat. This helps the calf to form a layer of blubber in order to stay warm.

## MAMMAL FACTS

YOUNG mammals drink milk from their mothers body.

Mammals are warm blooded which means the temperature inside their bodies is warm no matter what the temperature outside is.

Mammals use lungs to breath oxygen and so those living in the sea must come up to the

## Whale Features

### Body shape:

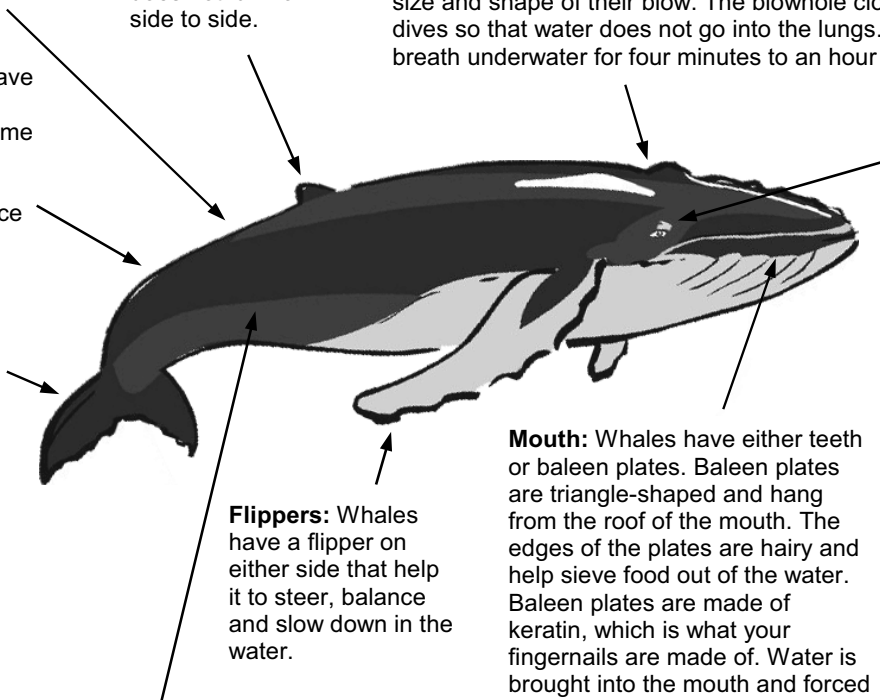
whales have streamlined bodies to move quickly and easily through the water.

**Dorsal fin:** This helps the whale balance so that it does not fall from side to side.

**Blowhole:** Whales do not have a nose and so breath using a blowhole. Baleen whales have two holes whereas toothed whales have only one. Warm air from the whales' lungs is pushed out through the blowhole into the cooler air outside and turns into water vapour. This is called the blow. Whales are often identified by the size and shape of their blow. The blowhole closes when a whale dives so that water does not go into the lungs. Whales can hold their breath underwater for four minutes to an hour or longer.

**Skin:** Whales have very soft and smooth skin. Some have lumps and parasites like barnacles and lice on the skin.

**Flukes:** There are two flukes that make up the whales tail. This moves up and down and propels the whale through the water. Individual whales are often identified by markings on their bodies and flukes.



### Eyes and ears:

Whales have good eyesight and excellent hearing. The eyes are on the side of the head and the ears are tiny holes located just behind the eyes. Some whales use echolocation to find objects in the water and to work out their size and shape. (Clicks produced by a whale can travel many miles in the water and bounce off objects. These sounds return to the whale as an echo helping it to work out the location of objects up ahead.)

**Mouth:** Whales have either teeth or baleen plates. Baleen plates are triangle-shaped and hang from the roof of the mouth. The edges of the plates are hairy and help sieve food out of the water. Baleen plates are made of keratin, which is what your fingernails are made of. Water is brought into the mouth and forced out through the plates, catching the food. Whales also have a large tongue that can weigh as much as an elephant.

**Blubber:** Blubber is a thick layer of fat under the skin that keeps the whale warm. It is also used as energy for the whale when food is scarce. It is lighter than water and so helps the whale float.