

Humpback whale

Megaptera novaeangliae

Named for its arching back as it dives, the humpback whale is a favorite of whale watchers because of its remarkable acrobatics and inquisitive nature. Humpbacks are also famous for their hauntingly beautiful ballads – individual songs used to communicate and attract mates. One beloved humpback, Salt, has been seen for 30 years in a row, and with her progeny of 10 calves and five known grandcalves, is a staple of the whale watching crowd.

Identified by long, white flippers and unique patterns on the underside of their tail flukes, humpbacks can be found in both the northern and southern hemisphere, and generally migrate between cool summer feeding and warm winter breeding grounds, clocking up to 10,000 miles (16,093 km) per year in some cases.

New research has shown that humpbacks contain specialized brain cells thought to process emotions, memories and insight – until now only seen in the brains of primates, including humans. Many experts believe that these cells signify capacity for intelligence and also suffering.

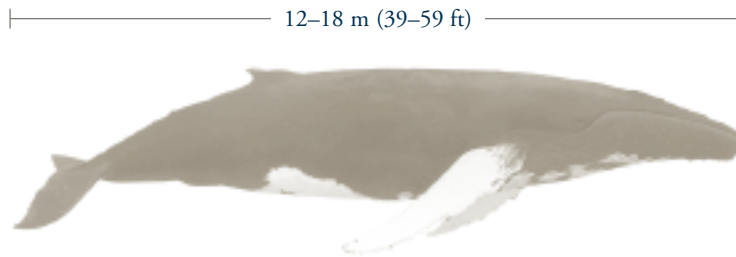
Commercial whaling of humpbacks officially stopped in 1966, but it is estimated that as much as 95 percent of the pre-exploitation population was eliminated. The Government of Japan tentatively suspended the hunting of 50 humpbacks in the 2007/2008 season.

The same coastal habits that make humpbacks an easy target for whalers make them prone to entanglement in fishing gear, collisions with ships and at risk from noise pollution.



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HUMPBACK WHALE
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Adult size	12 – 18 m (39 – 59 ft)
Calf size	3.75 – 4.5 m (12.3 – 14.8 ft)
Life span	50 years

Status: Vulnerable (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – IUCN)