

# Humpback Whales

The humpback whale is an immense, endangered mammal with a distinctive hump situated in front of its small dorsal fin. They are often found in large groups, called pods, and are well-known for having an aptitude for singing and being the noisiest of whales.

## Appearance

Humpback whales are usually dark grey in colour and on average, grow to around 14 to 19 metres long and weigh around 36,000kg. They have white bellies, long flippers and a tail fin called the fluke. The whales use these flippers and their fluke to slap the surface of the water and to propel themselves through it. They also use them when they want to leap out of the water. Scientists are still unsure if the whales do this for amusement or if it is actually being intentionally done by the whale for a particular job.

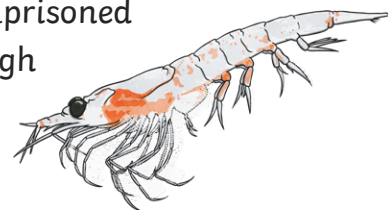
## Habitat

Humpback whales are a migratory species and can be typically found near the coastline. They travel thousands of miles when they migrate. In the summer months, they can be found near to the Arctic and Antarctic where there is an abundance of food for them to eat. In the winter months, they inhabit warmer climates located nearer to the equator. This is where they will acquire a mate and breed.

## Diet

Humpback whales are baleen whales. Baleen whales have baleen plates instead of teeth. This means they hunt and eat their food differently to other whales that have teeth. They consume their food by filtering it. These colossal predators open their mouths as they head towards their prey and filter enormous quantities of krill, shrimp, anchovies, small fish and copious amounts of crustaceans from the sea. They then force the water out of their mouths leaving just their food behind.

Humpback whales have also been seen capturing their prey inside a 'bubble net'. The whale dives into the ocean and then swims back up in a spiralling motion while it slowly releases bubbles from its blow holes. These bubbles form a sort of net around the prey causing them to be imprisoned within the bubbles. The whale then swims up through the net and feeds on what has been caught.



## Breeding

Female humpback whales will give birth to a calf (baby whale) about every two to four years and their pregnancy lasts for approximately 11 to 12 months. Once the calf is born, it will tend to stay in close proximity to its mother – often touching her with its flippers. As the calf matures, it develops a layer of blubber. This protects the newborn and allows it to follow its mother back to the cold waters of the Antarctic. The female will provide the calf with milk, which has a high fat content, for about the first year of its life but it will not be a fully-grown adult until it reaches ten years old.

## Protection

These amazing, beautiful mammals are unfortunately currently listed as endangered. In the 19th and early 20th century they were decimated by commercial fishing. In 1966, the Whaling Commission issued a ban on the commercial fishing of humpback whales in a move to prevent the extinction of these spectacular creatures. The ban worked and today the numbers of whales found in our oceans has risen. Although the number of humpback whales has increased, they are still under threat from entanglement in fishing equipment, plastic pollution found in our oceans and accidents with shipping vessels. Let's hope these intelligent, splendid whales continue to be protected.



# Questions

1. What does aptitude mean? Tick one.

- natural ability to do something
- dislike for something
- a hobby
- a strong liking for something

2. Which of these statements is true? Tick one.

- Humpback whales are usually dark blue in colour.
- Humpback whales are usually dark grey in colour.
- Humpback whales are usually dark green in colour.
- Humpback whales are usually dark brown in colour.

3. **Scientists are still unsure if the whales do this for amusement or if it is actually being intentionally done by the whale for a particular job.**

Write a synonym for the word **intentionally**.

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4. What do humpback whales eat?

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5. Find and copy one sentence from the text which shows that the calves feel vulnerable after they are born?

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6. Explain why the author has organised this text with sub-headings?

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7. Why do you think humpback whales jump out of the water? Explain your answer.

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8. In your own words explain how humpback whales capture their prey?

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9. What do you think could be done to improve the chances of the number of humpback whales rising?

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10. Summarise how you think the author feels about humpback whales. Explain your answer.

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# Answers

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- Humpback whales are usually dark blue in colour.
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- Humpback whales are usually dark brown in colour.

3. **Scientists are still unsure if the whales do this for amusement or if it is actually being intentionally done by the whale for a particular job.**

Write a synonym for the word **intentionally**.

**Accept any of the following: purposely; deliberately; knowingly; consciously**

4. What do humpback whales eat?

**Humpback whales eat krill, shrimp, anchovies, small fish and crustaceans.**

5. Find and copy one sentence from the text which shows that the calves feel vulnerable after they are born?

**'Once the calf is born, it will tend to stay in close proximity to its mother- often touching her with its flippers.'**

6. Explain why the author has organised this text with sub-headings?

**Accept any reasonable explanation as to the use sub-headings within the text., such as: I think the author has used sub-headings to make the text easier to navigate.**

7. Why do you think humpback whales jump out of the water? Explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think humpback whales may jump out of the water to remove pests from their body.**

8. In your own words explain how humpback whales capture their prey?

**Accept any suitable answer, such as: Humpback whales have no teeth but have special plates called baleen plates. They use these to filter their prey from the water. They open their mouth and swallow and filter the prey to get rid of the sea water.**

9. What do you think could be done to improve the chances of the number of humpback whales rising?

Pupils' own responses, such as: To improve the chances of the number of humpback whales rising people could work to reduce the amount of plastic that is put into the ocean or develop fishing equipment which reduces the risk of entanglement. This would mean fewer whales die as a result.

10. Summarise how you think the author feels about humpback whales. Explain your answer.

**Accept any answers which explain that the author feels enthusiastic and protective about these mammals as he has used emotive languages such as: decimated, endangered, spectacular, intelligent, splendid to describe them and the situation they are in.**