



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*)

Description

Right whales are large baleen whales with a stocky black body, paddle shaped pectoral flippers, and a large head covered in white callosities. Callosities are patches of roughened skin that are covered with a small crustacean known as “whale lice”. Right whales can be recognized by their V-shaped blow and lack of a dorsal fin.

Habitat and Distribution

Right whales primarily occur in coastal or shelf waters. Their winter calving grounds are off the southeastern United States, and their summer feeding grounds are off New England and Canada. High use habitat areas include coastal Florida and Georgia, Great South Channel, Massachusetts Bay and Cape Cod Bay, Bay of Fundy, and the Scotian Shelf.

Sounds

Right whales maintain contact with each other using an “up call”. They also produce low-frequency moans, groans, belches, and pulses. When socializing with other right whales in a “surface active group”, they make screams and a sound that resembles a gunshot. Right whales do not use echolocation.

Feeding

Right whales feed on tiny zooplankton, primarily copepods. Unlike other baleen whales, right whales are skimmers – they feed by moving through the water slowly with their mouth open and straining the tiny creatures using their baleen.

Threats

Although right whales are no longer hunted, they are still critically endangered. The main threats to their survival today are ship strikes and entanglement in fishing gear.

Fun Fact

Named because they were the “right” whale to hunt - they were found close to shore, moved slowly, yielded a high quantity of oil, and would float when killed.



Allison Henry / NEFSC



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Family:	Balaenidae
Population:	350 – 450
Status:	Endangered
Length:	45 – 55 feet
Weight:	Up to 70 tons