



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

### Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

#### Description

Blue whales are the largest of the whales, and can weigh up to 300,000 pounds (150 tons)! Like other baleen whales, females are usually larger than males. Blue whales have a long and slender mottled gray body with a broad, flat rostrum and a small dorsal fin. When viewed through the water, they appear light blue.

#### Habitat and Distribution

Blue whales occur in sub-polar to sub-tropical waters worldwide. They migrate seasonally between summer feeding grounds near the poles to winter breeding grounds in the subtropics, although in some areas there are individuals year-round. They are occasionally in coastal waters, but more frequently offshore.

#### Sounds

Blue whales produce some of the loudest sounds in the ocean including long multi-part vocalizations with pulses, buzzes, and rasps. Most vocalizations are in the 15-40 Hz range below the level of human hearing. Geographic variations in their vocalizations may help scientists differentiate separate populations.

#### Feeding

Despite their massive size, blue whales feed almost exclusively on tiny krill which they filter using their baleen plates.

#### Threats

Although blue whales are no longer hunted, they continue to face anthropogenic (human-caused) threats including ship strikes. Natural sources of mortality include ice entrapment and predation by killer whales.

#### Fun Fact

Blue whales are the largest animal ever to have lived on Earth!



Dan Shapiro



NEFSC

Family: Balaenopteridae  
Population: ~ 4,000 — 5,000  
Status: Endangered  
Length: 75 — 100 feet  
Weight: 100 — 150 tons