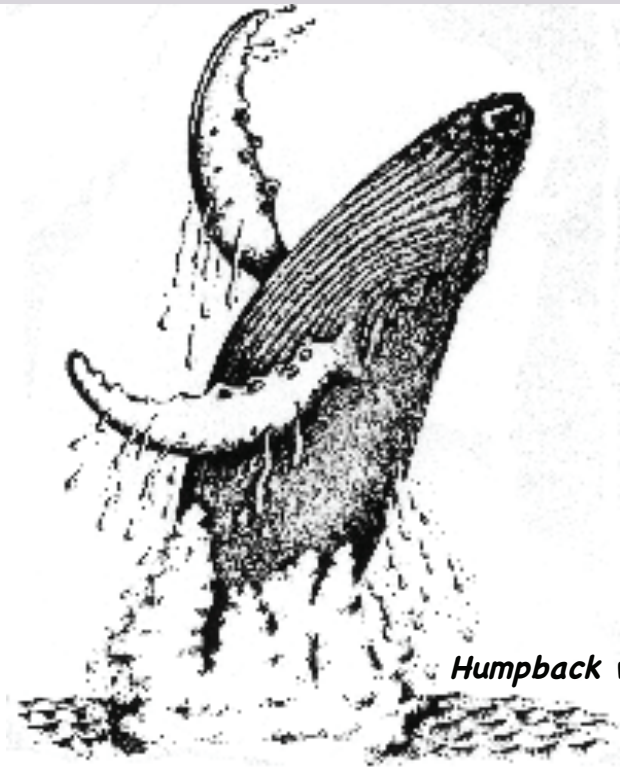


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The Most Frequently Sighted

# Whales

At Point Lobos State Natural Reserve



*Humpback whale*

California Department of Parks and Recreation  
supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors  
with disabilities who need assistance  
should contact Point Lobos State Natural Reserve,  
831-624-4909 (TTY relay service, 711)  
This brochure is available in alternate formats.

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# WHEN AND WHERE TO LOOK

Whales can be seen off the coastline of the Reserve at any time of the year, although some months are better than others. Elevated locales with broad vistas of open ocean are best. For example, the Sea Lion Point and Sand Hill trails provide excellent vantage points.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Scan the surface of the water all the way to the horizon and look for a waterspout or a cloud of condensation that may hang in the air for a few seconds. These are created when the whale exhales. Whales are mammals (as are we humans), and must breathe air in order to survive. Their breathing process takes place at the surface, and enormous quantities of air are exchanged in a matter of a few seconds. Once you locate a "**blow**", stay with it. Where you see one blow, you will see others. Occasionally, a whale will assume a vertical posture in the water with its head partially out of the water. This is referred to as "**spyhopping**". Sometimes the whale will rise out of the water (often 1/2 to 3/4 of its length). This is referred to as "**breaching**". If a whale breaches once, it very likely will do it again. Keep watching!

## PACIFIC GRAY WHALE

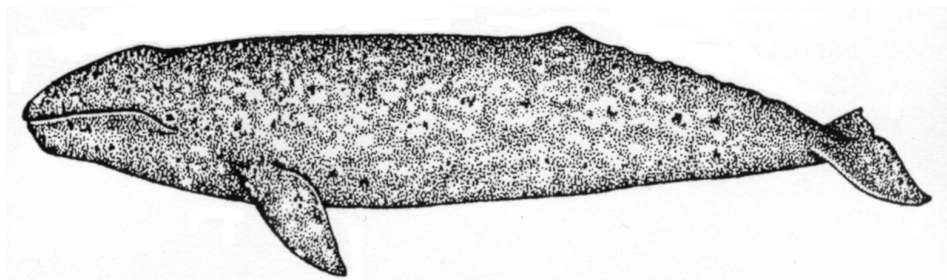
*Eschrichtius robustus*

The gray whale is the most commonly seen whale at Point Lobos. They make their appearance in December in the course of migrating from their Arctic feeding grounds to the warm water lagoons of Baja California, Mexico.

With a round trip of approximately 10,000 to 12,000 miles, this migration is one of the longest that is made by mammals.

The peak of this southerly migration usually occurs around January 15th, but can be a few weeks earlier or later. Birthing and mating activities sometimes occur on the trip south, but usually take place in the warmer climate of their destination. The 15 foot calf has a better start in life if it is born in the warm water of a sheltered lagoon. After the birthing process is complete, and/or after mating, the northerly trip starts in February, peaks in March and can continue into April. The impregnated females and the males generally leave first, with the mother and calf pairs taking more time in order to allow for growth of the calf.

Gray whales can be seen through May, with the mother and calf pairs hugging the coast to avoid orcas which prey on the calves.



Adult gray whales weigh 35 to 45 tons and are 40 to 50 feet long. They usually blow 3 to 5 times in 15 to 30 second intervals before raising their tails (flukes) for a deep dive. A gray whale can stay underwater for up to 15 minutes and can swim 3 to 6 miles per hour,

The gray whale filters its food through **baleen** in its mouth. It has no teeth. Both the Information Station and the Whalers Cabin have specimens of baleen that you may touch. In addition, The Whaling Station Museum has an

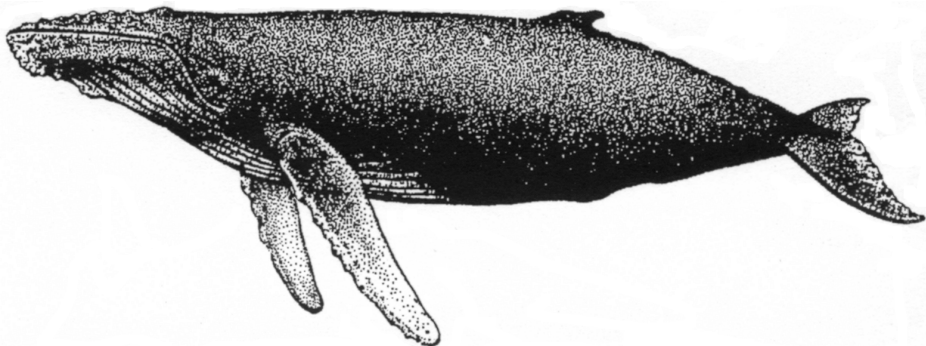
assortment of whalebones on the grounds. Refer to your map.

The gray whale population has fluctuated dramatically. Driven nearly to extinction in the 1850's when the calving lagoons were discovered and exploited, and again in the early 1900's with the advent of floating factory ships, the gray whale population in the eastern Pacific has at least partly recovered. Since receiving full protection from commercial whaling in the 1940's, the gray whale population here has returned to about 20,000 animals. Genetic evidence suggests that this is about a third to a fifth of the original population. Of particular concern is the fact that large numbers of gray whales were found in 2007 to be undernourished to the point of starvation. A changing climate may be altering the distribution or abundance of the tiny bottom-dwelling amphipods on which gray whales mainly feed.

## HUMPBACK WHALE

*Megaptera novaeangliae*

Within the last ten years, the humpback whale has become a frequent visitor to Monterey Bay and Point Lobos. As early as March and on through December, humpbacks



can be seen. They forage for krill and small baitfish, which are plentiful during these months. They can be very

entertaining to watch, because they breach often and slap their tails (**lob-tailing**) or their flippers on the water. Their flippers, which are very long, make quite a display. Their coloration usually includes a lot of white along with black.

The length of the adult humpback averages 54 feet, and their weight averages 45 tons. Heavily harvested by whalers until the 1970's, humpback whales now number in the 30,000-40,000 range, worldwide. This is estimated to be about a third of the original population.

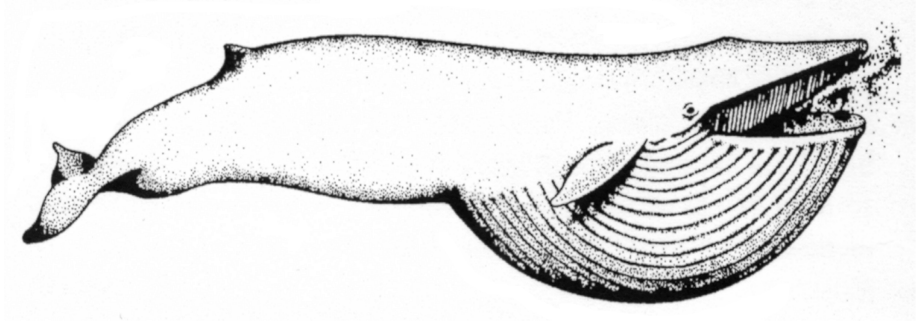
The humpback whales seen in the Monterey area spend the winter months in the warmer waters of Mexico or Central America, where they will calve and mate. They generally travel in groups (pods), but occasionally will be seen traveling alone. The humpbacks are noted for their beautiful songs, which can last from a few minutes to 30 minutes, and occasionally for hours. A tape of humpback songs can be heard at the Whaling Station Museum at Whalers Cove, where a large section of humpback whale baleen is also on display.

## **BLUE WHALE**

### ***Balaenoptera musculus***

Blue whales are the largest animals ever to have lived on Earth – larger than the largest dinosaur. These magnificent marine mammals rule the oceans at up to 100 feet (30 meters) long and weigh as much as 200 tons (181 metric tons). An average weight for an adult is 100-150 tons. A good way to visualize their length is to remember that they are about as long as three school buses. A blue whale's tail is as wide as a professional soccer net -- about 25 feet (8 meters) and their tongues weigh about as much as an elephant.

A blue whale heart is the size of a Volkswagen Beetle and you and 400 other people could fit in its mouth.



Blue whale blows, also called spouts, consist of air and water and rise about 30 feet (9.1 meters) high. Blue whales feed on a diet composed nearly exclusively of krill, tiny shrimp-like animals that are up to three inches long.

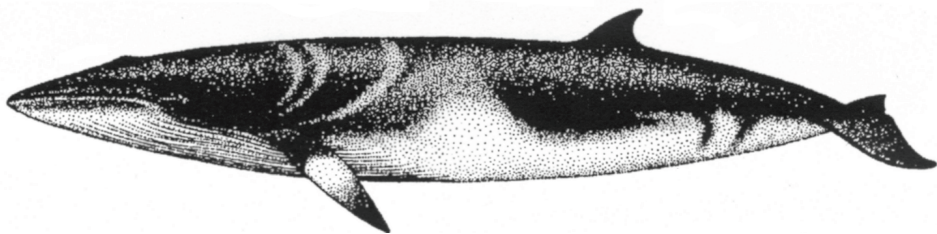
A blue whale can eat up to 8,000 lbs. (4 tons) of krill during its summer peak feeding season, primarily around the Channel Islands, Monterey Bay, and the Farallon Islands. During the winter months, they migrate to the warmer waters in Mexico and Costa Rica.

## **MINKE WHALE**

*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

The minke whale is the smallest baleen whale and quite common in all the oceans of the world. The fact that this whale is small (27 to 35 feet in length), weighs 10 to 15 tons, and usually swims alone with a rarely visible spout, makes it difficult to spot. Its dorsal fin is striking

and prominent, and will appear at the same time as the blow hole. Its body is dark above, often with a gray chevron crossing the back behind the head, and white underneath. The minke whale does not spend much time on the surface; it breathes about seven times and dives without showing its flukes. Typically it has a white patch on its flippers, but the flippers can also be completely black or white. It eats krill and small fish.



Minke whales have generally been thought to be too small to warrant hunting. Japan and Norway have hunted them and continue to do so. Past research has not been extensive, due primarily to their elusive nature. As hunting continues, more research is being done. Little is yet known of their breeding grounds or their reproductive strategies. Their principal predators are man and orca.

## **ORCA OR KILLER WHALE**

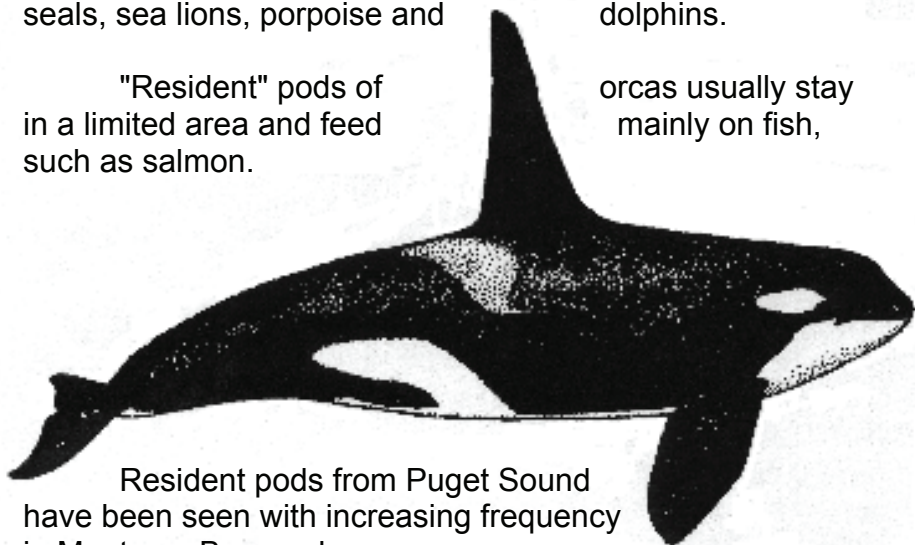
### ***Orcinus orca***

The orca is a “toothed whale” which uses echolocation to hunt its prey. The striking black and white pattern on its body makes it a beautiful sight! An adult can be up to 32 feet long and weigh up to 11 tons. Its large, prominent dorsal fin (6 feet on males) makes it one of the easiest marine mammals to identify. The male orca's fin is erect and almost spike-like; the female's is slightly curved and smaller. The orca has 10 to 14 pairs of sharp teeth in each of the upper and lower jaws (total of 40-56 teeth). No documented cases exist of a wild orca using these teeth on humans.

The orca can be found in all the world's oceans. Three genetically different groups of orcas visit our area. One group, called "transients", travel great distances and feed mostly on marine mammals, including whales. Certain recognizable transient orcas return every spring to prey on the gray whale calves migrating north with their mothers. The transient orcas are truly the top predators in the ocean. They are seen at other times of the year also, feeding on seals, sea lions, porpoise and dolphins.

"Resident" pods of in a limited area and feed such as salmon.

orcas usually stay mainly on fish,



Resident pods from Puget Sound have been seen with increasing frequency in Monterey Bay, perhaps as a consequence of the dwindling salmon population on the West Coast.

"Offshore" orcas are seen mainly in winter and eat squid, fish and sharks. They travel in large groups for long distances.

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