

# Wonderful Whales



 **beanstack originals**



# Wonderful Whales

*Dive into the world of whales!*



Get ready to meet some of the largest animals on the planet. Find out what makes these ocean giants so amazing, and why they are so important.

## Whale Basics

So, what are whales? They may spend their lives in the ocean, but they are mammals. Mammals are animals that have skeletons and feed their babies with milk. Mammals are warm-blooded, meaning that their bodies help keep them warm. Mammals also usually have at least some hair (or fur), and most mammals give birth to their babies instead of laying eggs. Because whales live in the ocean, they are known as marine mammals.

Even though they are mammals, whales are very at home in the ocean. On top of being warm-blooded, whales stay

warm in cold waters thanks to something called blubber. Blubber is a thick layer of fat. Whales also have flippers and tails, like fish, which help them steer and move through the water. On top of that, whales can hold their breath for a very long time. Some can even stay underwater for more than three hours!

Aside from being amazing animals, whales are also very important for the planet. In fact, whales help supply the oxygen you breathe! How is that possible? Well, it is all thanks to whale waste—or whale

### FUN FACT

**A whale's tail fins are called flukes.**



## Wonderful Whales



poop. Whale waste spreads nutrients in the ocean. This helps ocean plants grow. One type of plant it helps is called phytoplankton. Phytoplankton is a tiny ocean plant that creates oxygen. Phytoplankton also stores some gases, such as a gas called carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a gas that makes Earth's atmosphere hotter. Because it stores this gas, the phytoplankton is important to keep Earth's atmosphere at the right temperature. And it's all thanks to whale poop!



A bumpy gray humpback whale glides through the water.

### Humming Humpbacks

Meet one of the most famous whales in the sea: the humpback whale. These gentle giants can be found in waters around the world. Humpback whales grow from 48 to 63 feet (14.6 to 19.2 m). That's longer than a full-sized school bus! And these whales can weigh 40 tons—as much as five large African elephants!

Even though these whales are giant, their dinners are tiny. Humpback whales usually feed on small fish, or on tiny ocean animals called krill. However, humpbacks don't have teeth. Instead, they have a comblike bristle inside their mouth called baleen. The baleen catches tiny animals in the water, sort of like a window screen.

Humpback whales are famous for their songs. That's right—these whales sing! Humpbacks make many sounds, such as groans, cries, and more. They put these sounds together, making “songs” that can last for more than 30 minutes. Scientists think that whales sing to communicate with each other, and to court mates



## Wonderful Whales



Three white belugas swim and smile together.

### Beautiful Belugas

Way out in the chilly waters of the Arctic, a white head pops above the surface of the water. It's a beluga! Beluga whales are born gray or brown, but fade to a bright white when they are adults. On top of their unusual color, belugas also have a unique appearance thanks to their large foreheads. Belugas are on the smaller side (for whales!), reaching from 13 to 20 feet (4 to 6.1 m).

These whales mostly live in the planet's cold, northern ocean waters. And even though this region, called the Arctic, is very chilly, belugas are right at home. Their blubber keeps them warm!

In these northern waters, they feed on fish and other small ocean animals. However, belugas must be careful, as they are sometimes hunted by orcas (often called "killer whales") and even polar bears.

Beluga whales are known for making many different noises. In fact, they are sometimes called "the canaries of the sea"! This is because they often chirp, whistle, click, and squeal to communicate. Belugas can also copy sounds made by other animals or objects.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**The early ancestors of whales walked on four legs on land.**



## Wonderful Whales



*A narwhal's spiraling, spike-like tooth gleams in the water.*

### Notable Narwhals

Although it is sometimes called the unicorn of the sea, the narwhal is very real! The narwhal is a type of toothed whale. Narwhals can be found in chilly northern waters near the Arctic, similar to belugas. There, they spend their time diving deep to catch fish and other ocean animals. Narwhals grow from about 13 to 20 feet (4 to 6.1 m), about as long as a giraffe is tall. They have distinct coloring, with gray and silvery speckles.

The narwhal is best known for its tooth, or tusk. That's right—although it may look like a horn on top of its head, the narwhal's famous spike is actually a tooth. This tooth grows in a spiral pattern through the narwhal's top lip. And it can grow to be up to 10 feet (3 m) long—longer than a car! Scientists aren't sure exactly what narwhals use their tusks for. However, experts think males may use their tusks to fight each other when courting females. Talk about making a splash!