



# BLUE WHALES

## LEARN THE FACTS

Commercial whaling during much of the past century killed almost 99% of blue whales, and although the species appears to be beginning a recovery trend in some areas, today the numbers of whales in the world's oceans are still only a small fraction of their historic levels. Environmental Defense Center (EDC) is dedicated to working towards full recovery of a sustainable population of blue whales and has filed a notice threatening to sue National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) unless the agency implements its own Blue Whale Recovery Plan.

### SIZE & AGE:

- Blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) are the largest animal to have ever lived on Earth, and average between 70-80 feet in length and 70 tons in weight. The average adult blue whale is almost as long as a Boeing 737. Their tongues alone can weigh as much as an elephant and their hearts as much as an automobile.
- Blue whales almost certainly live longer than 50 years, and could possibly achieve maximum life spans of up to 90-100 years.



Blue whale in the Santa Barbara Channel. Photo by L. Krop

### DISTRIBUTION & MIGRATION

- Blue whales are found in all oceans of the world.
- Most blue whale populations are believed to be migratory and to travel thousands of miles a year. Travel speeds are around 12 mph (19.3 km/hr) but can increase to speeds of 30 mph (43.8 km/hr) when alarmed.
- The Santa Barbara Channel hosts the largest seasonal population of blue whales on the planet.

### FEEDING & BEHAVIOR:

- One of the largest animals in the world actually feeds on one of the smallest. Blue whales feed primarily on tiny shrimp-like animals called krill.
- When a blue whale exhales it can blow a spout approximately 30 feet high.

### VOCALIZATION

- The blue whale makes deep rumbling sounds that can be described as grunts, hums and moans. These sounds are used to communicate with other blue whales, and can be heard over hundreds of miles.

## STATUS & PROTECTION

- Whaling throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century eliminated up to 99% of the world's blue whales. Pre-whaling population estimates were over 350,000 individuals. Populations today are estimated to be around 2,000 in the Antarctic, 3,300 in the North Pacific, and a few hundred in the North Atlantic. Globally, the blue whale population is estimated to be more than 10,000 animals.
- Blue whales are listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and are also protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).
- The Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level for blue whales under the MMPA is 1.4. The PBR is a number referring to the maximum number of animals, not including natural mortalities, that may be removed from a population annually while still allowing that population to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable size.

## THREATS FACING BLUE WHALES

- Humans are the number one predator of blue whales and illegal whaling still occurs today in Japan. Other human threats include: ship strikes, climate change, fisheries interactions including entanglement, pollution, and anthropogenic noise such as sonar.
- In 2007 four blue whale mortalities from ship strikes were documented in the Santa Barbara Channel.



NOAA photo

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FAILS TO TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT BLUE WHALES

- Eleven years have passed since NMFS approved its Blue Whale Recovery Plan. Unfortunately NMFS has failed to implement the key provisions of the Recovery Plan including:
  - Establishing criteria for delisting or down listing the species
  - Designating a blue whale implementation coordinator
  - Determining stock structure using genetic analysis
  - Identifying and implementing methods to reduce ship collisions
  - Conducting studies to determine effects of environmental pollution to whales and their habitat
  - Identifying and protecting essential blue whale habitat

## EDC'S ACTION- HOW YOU CAN HELP

EDC is requesting that NMFS implement the provisions in its Blue Whale Recovery Plan to recover whales to the point where the protections of the Act are no longer necessary. If necessary, we will pursue legal action to ensure that NMFS fulfills this most basic duty under the Endangered Species Act.

Supporters can join our campaign to protect the blue whale by becoming a member of EDC and lending your voice to our cause. Together we can assure that this amazing creature will not become extinct, but instead will be restored to a healthy population level. [www.edcnet.org](http://www.edcnet.org)

## ADDITIONAL LINKS TO INFORMATION ABOUT BLUE WHALES:

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary: <http://channelislands.noaa.gov/animals/bluwhal.html>

American Cetacean Society: <http://www.acsonline.org/factpack/bluewhl.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/cetaceans/bluewhale.htm>