

Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*



🇫🇮 Avgustur 🇩🇪 Kigutilissuit 🇩🇰 Búrhvalur 🇳🇴 Spermasetthval 🇫🇮 Kaskelohtta 🇩🇰 Kaskelothval



Sperm whale © Shane Gross

Sperm whales are the biggest **toothed whales** and **predators**. They have a long, narrow lower jaw with about 25 teeth on each side, but none of them is on the upper jaw. You can find them in oceans all over the world, from the tropics to the ice edge. They are famous for their long and deep dives, going down to 2,000 metres and staying underwater for up to two hours. They mostly eat deep-sea squid, and their big, square heads often get scars from fighting them. They have also got the biggest brains of any animal, weighing up to 9 kilograms!

Adult length 16 metres
Adult weight 45,000 kg
Maximum age 70 years
Eats squid, octopus, large fish
Group size 1-10

Predators killer whales
IUCN status vulnerable (2022)
NA abundance 30,000
Not hunted in the North Atlantic

Main threats:



Climate change



Ship strike



Entanglement



Noise disturbance



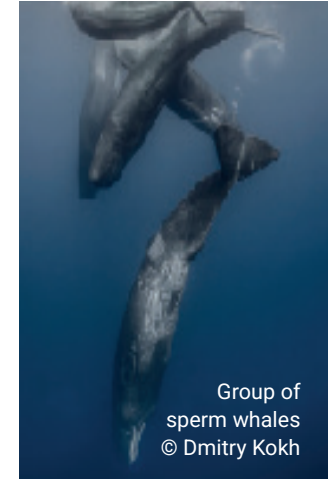
Pollution

Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*



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In colder waters, such as the Northeast Atlantic, we tend to mainly find solitary, adult male sperm whales. Males are much larger (16 metres) than the females (11 metres), and have a thicker layer of **blubber** to keep them warm. The females tend to stay at lower latitudes, in warmer waters, where they live in social groups with their **calves** and juveniles. While the adult females go for their deep feeding dives, often one female stays with the calves on the surface to “babysit” and even nurse other calves. On rare occasions, and only during certain times of the year and in specific regions, sperm whales gather in **superpods** of hundreds of whales, coming together for social reasons, like rubbing against one another to shed skin.



Group of sperm whales © Dmitry Kokh



Scars on sperm whales' head © Dmitry Kokh

In the past, sperm whales were hunted for the **spermaceti** oil in their heads, used for lighting and lubrication. Nowadays, people value **ambergris**, a rare substance formed in their digestive system, which gathers around objects the whale cannot digest, such as squid beaks. Ambergris has a unique smell and is used in perfumes to make scents last longer. It's expensive because it's hard to find, often washed ashore or floating in the ocean. Despite modern alternatives, ambergris is still highly desired in the fragrance industry, and a single piece can fetch thousands of dollars.



Research: While **baleen whales** have two blowholes on their head, **toothed whales** only have one. These are typically on the middle of the head, but the blowhole of the sperm whale is on the left side. Why is that?