Definition: blue whale from Philip’s Encyclopedia

Baleen whale, related to the rorquals. The blue whale is the largest animal that has ever lived, reaching up to 30m (100ft) in length and weighing as much as 120 tonnes. In summer it lives in polar seas. Mating occurs at the end of winter and the whales migrate to warmer latitudes to give birth. A single calf is born every two or three years, after a 10-11 month gestation period. They live up to 50 years. Overhunting has led to threat of extinction. Species Balaenoptera musculus.

Summary Article: blue whale from The Columbia Encyclopedia

a baleen whale, Balaenoptera musculus. Also called the sulphur-bottom whale and Sibbald’s rorqual, it is the largest animal that has ever lived. Blue whales have been known to reach a length of 100 ft (30.5 m) and to weigh up to 200 tons (180 metric tons), but the typical size is about 70–90 ft (21–27 m) and 100–150 tons (90–135 metric tons). The blue whale is slate blue in color and has a dorsal fin. It is toothless and has fringed baleen, or whalebone, plates in its mouth, which act as a food strainer. As water is expelled from the whale’s mouth, plankton is trapped behind the strainer. The neck of the blue whale has 80 to 100 conspicuous furrows called ventral grooves, which alternately expand and contract as the animal takes in and expels water. The blue whale is cosmopolitan in distribution. In summer it inhabits polar seas, feeding in the water of melting icepacks; in winter it migrates to warmer latitudes, occasionally reaching the equator. Mating occurs at the end of winter, with a single calf born every second or third year, after a gestation period of 10 to 11 months. The calf is nursed for 6 months and reaches puberty in about 3 years. Blue whales may live 100 years or more. Because of extensive whaling, their numbers have been reduced from an estimated 400,000 to between 10,000 and 25,000, and they are listed as endangered. In 2014 the California population, which ranges along W North America, was determined by researchers to have recovered to sustainable levels. They are classified in the phylum Chordata, subphylum Vertebrata, class Mammalia, order Cetacea, family Balaenopteridae.


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