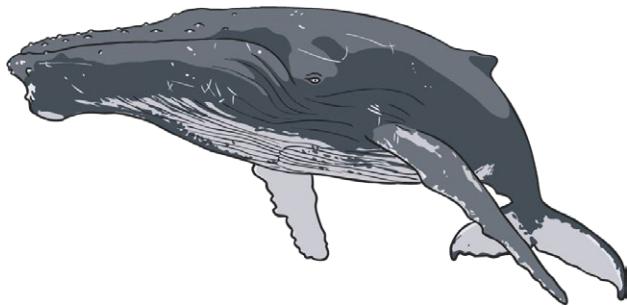


Humpback Whales

The humpback whale is an enormous, endangered mammal with a distinctive hump situated in front of its small dorsal fin. They are often found in large groups, called pods and are well-known for their singing capabilities and being the noisiest of whales.



Appearance

Humpback whales are usually dark grey in colour and on average, grow to around 14 to 19 metres long and weigh around 36,000kg. They have white bellies, long flippers and a tail fin called the fluke. The whales use these flippers and their fluke to slap the surface of the water and to propel themselves through it. They also use them when they want to leap out of the water. Scientists are still unsure if the whales do this for amusement or if it is actually helping the whale to do a job.

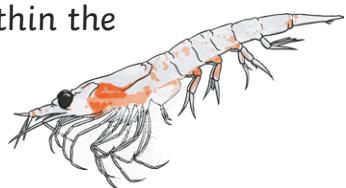
Habitat

Humpback whales are typically found near the coastline and travel thousands of miles when they migrate. In the summer months, they can be found near to the Arctic and Antarctic where there is a copious amount of food for them to eat. In the winter months, they inhabit warmer climates found nearer to the equator. This is where they will go to find a mate and breed.

Diet

Humpback whales are baleen whales. Baleen whales have baleen plates instead of teeth. This means they hunt and eat their food differently to other whales which do have teeth. They consume their food by filtering it. These large predators open their mouths as they head towards their prey and filter enormous amounts of krill, shrimp, anchovies, small fish and numerous crustaceans from the sea. They then push the water out of their mouths leaving just their food behind.

Humpback whales have also been seen trapping their prey inside a 'bubble net'. The whale dives into the ocean and then swims back up in a spiralling motion while it slowly releases bubbles from its blow hole. These bubbles form a sort of net around the prey causing them to be imprisoned within the bubbles. The whale then swims up through the net and feeds on what has been snared.



Breeding

Female humpback whales will have a calf (baby whale) about every two to four years and their pregnancy lasts for around 11 to 12 months. Once the calf is born, it will tend to stay very close to its mother so close that it can touch its mother with its flippers. As the calf matures, it develops a layer of blubber. This protects the newborn and allows it to follow its mother back to the cold waters of the Antarctic. The female will provide the calf with milk for about the first year of its life, but it will not be a fully grown adult until it reaches ten years old.

Protection

These amazing, beautiful mammals are unfortunately currently listed as endangered. In the 19th and early 20th century they were decimated by commercial fishing. In 1966, the Whaling Commission issued a ban on the commercial fishing of humpback whales in a move to prevent the extinction of these spectacular creatures. The ban worked and, today, the numbers of whales found in our oceans has risen.

Let's hope these intelligent, splendid whales continue to be protected.



Questions

1. Which of these would not be found on a humpback whale? Tick one.

- fluke teeth
- blow hole flippers

2. What name is given to a group of humpback whales?

- school flock
- pod herd

3. Find and copy a word which shows that the humpback whale is easy to identify.

4. Name a place the humpback whale can be found in the summer and winter months.

5. Fill in the missing words from this sentence.

These large _____ as they head towards their prey and filter enormous amounts of krill, shrimp, anchovies, small fish and _____.

6. Why do you think the author places the words **bubble net** inside inverted commas?

7. 'I think humpback whales jump out of the water for fun.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

8. Explain why you think a calf would stay close to its mother?

9. In the final paragraph why does the author choose to use the words decimated, extinction and spectacular?

Answers

1. Which of these would not be found on a humpback whale? Tick one.

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- pod herd

3. Find and copy a word which shows that the humpback whale is easy to identify.

distinctive

4. Name a place the humpback whale can be found in the summer and winter months.

Humpback whales can be found in the Antarctic and warmer waters near the equator.

5. Fill in the missing words from this sentence.

These large **predators open their mouths** as they head towards their prey and filter enormous amounts of krill, shrimp, anchovies, small fish and **numerous crustaceans from the sea**.

6. Why do you think the author places the words **bubble net** inside inverted commas?

Accept any answers which explain that inverted commas are used when you are coining a new word or phrase, such as: Bubble nets do not really exist. It is a made up term to explain how the whales capture their prey.

7. 'I think humpback whales jump out of the water for fun.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

Accept 'yes and no' with a reasonable explanation, such as: Scientists are still not sure whether humpback whales jump out of the water for fun or whether it has a purpose.

8. Explain why you think a calf would stay close to its mother?

The calf may feel vulnerable and only feel safe near its mother as it is still very young and new to the world.

9. In the final paragraph why does the author choose to use the words decimated, extinction and spectacular?

Accept any answer which explains that the author has used emotive language in order to express how strongly he feels about not letting the number of these amazing mammals drop again.