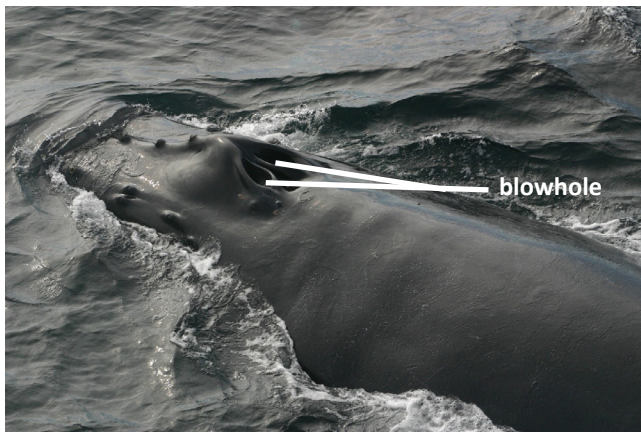


Baleen Whales



Many people think of baleen whales as the giants of the sea. There are 14 species of baleen whales. They range in size from the smallest, minke and pygmy right whales. Both reaching lengths 20 to 21 ft. (6-6.7 m). The longest whale is also a baleen whale. Blue whales reach lengths up to 90 ft. (27 m).

In a nutshell, 1) Baleen whales have baleen rather than teeth; 2) They have two blowholes; 3) Females are generally larger than males; 4) They migrate to and from feeding and breeding grounds. 5) They are usually found alone or in small groups during feeding or breeding season.



Baleen whales have two blowholes (aka nostrils)

What is baleen? Baleen is made of the same material as our fingernails or hair.

Baleen plates hang from the whale's upper jaw, sort of like vertical blinds. The widest part of the plate is at the top then it gets smaller toward the bottom. The (outside) non-fringed part of the baleen feels similar to a person's fingernail. Inside the whale's mouth, the plates are frayed. The frayed edges (inside the mouth) look and feel like stiff, thick plastic hair or long bristles from a scrub brush.

How does baleen work? The fringed edges inside the mouth mat together. The whale takes in a mouth full of water and food and then pushes the water out between the baleen plates. The food is trapped in the fringes of the baleen. The food is swallowed whole.

Baleen whale calves are born with soft, short baleen. Like our fingernails, baleen continues to grow throughout the animal's life.

Baleen plates may be wide and long, but compared to the size of the animal they are not very thick. The

-- more --



Courtesy NOAA

Photos Courtesy NOAA

©2000, 2017 WhaleTimes Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Baleen Whales pg 2

number, size, and color of the baleen plates varies with the species and size of the individual whale. Gray whales, for example, can have 130 to 180 baleen plates.

Right whales have the longest baleen. It can be 8 to 13 feet long. A blue whale's baleen can be 3 feet long. Gray whales' range from 2 to 10 inches.

People hunted whales for their baleen (and blubber). Before plastics, the baleen, sometimes called whalebone, was used for corset stays, buggy whips, umbrella ribs, carriage springs, skirt hoops, brushes, combs, shoehorns, nets, fishing rods, and other products.



Baleen plates from gray whale

OUTSIDE VIEW

Baleen plates hang side-by-side from the upper jaw

Water is pushed out between baleen plates. The fringe of the baleen plates traps prey.



©2000, 2017 WhaleTimes Inc. All Rights Reserved.



Baleen plates from gray whale

INSIDE VIEW



This side faces the
inside of the mouth

The fringe of the baleen
plates traps prey.

©2000, 2017 WhaleTimes Inc. All Rights Reserved.