

# Whales and Dolphins

There are 79 species of whale and dolphin all over the world they are mostly found in the oceans and rivers. **Most species are vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered** they are considered to be one of the most intelligent animals. The tropical waters of areas such as the Canary Islands attract as many as 28 different species.



## The key threats to cetaceans are:

### Pollution

Pollution in the ocean is a major problem that is affecting the ocean and the rest of the planet. **Pollution in the ocean directly affects ocean organisms and indirectly affects human health and resources.** Oil spills, toxic wastes, and dumping of other harmful materials are all major sources of pollution in the ocean.

### Hunting

Whales have been hunted by humans throughout history for their meat, bones and blubber. Commercial whaling during the 19th century wiped out most of the world's whale populations. As whales mature and breed slowly, **whale numbers will take a long time to recover**, if they do at all.

### By catch

By-catch the capture in fishing gear of unwanted fish and other species, is **one of the greatest global threats facing dolphins, porpoises, and whales.** When caught in fishing nets, many of these cetaceans, which need to come to the surface for air, get trapped underwater and die.

### Global warming

Climate change impacts are currently greatest in the Arctic and the Antarctic. Cetaceans that rely on polar, icy waters for their habitat and food resources, such as belugas, narwhal, and bowhead whales, are likely to be dramatically affected by the reduction of sea ice cover.

This paper will focus on **4 species** to be found across are project ranges: pilot whale, humpback whale, blue whale and sperm whale.



### Facts concerning pilot whales

- Adult males measure up to 22 feet and weigh up to 3 tonnes. Adult females' measure up to 16 feet and weigh up to 1.5 tonnes.
- The pilot whale feeds primarily on squid however they also prey on fish and octopus.

### Threats and population

- Residents of the **Faroe Islands** in Denmark slaughter and eat pilot whales every year pilot whales have been a central part of their diet for over 1000 years. They **crowd the whales into a bay and kill them as a "rite of passage"**. Traditionally the meat would be used to supplement the natives' diet however the meat is now sold to the highest bidding country such as **Japan** who value the meat highly.



- Pilot whales are not considered to be endangered but are data deficient, meaning there is no record of the population numbers. **Through AWF research** we know there are around 500 residents in Tenerife that are protected and not hunted.
- **Humans have taken advantage of the social nature of pilot whales.** "Drive fisheries" where groups are herded to the beach for slaughter, have taken place on Cape Cod, Newfoundland, the Faroe Islands, Shetland, and Orkney Islands, Iceland, and Norway.

### Blue Whale



### Facts about Blue whales

- The blue whale is the largest animal that ever lived on Earth.
- Recent research indicates that blue whales reach sexual maturity between the ages of 6-10 years, or Calves are born at intervals of 2 to 3 years and gestation is about 12 months.
- Blue whales may be found in all oceans of the world

## Pilot Whale

### Threats and population

- Because of their enormous size and speed, blue whales were safe from early whalers, who could not pursue them in open boats with hand harpoons. But in 1868 a Norwegian, Sven Foyn, revolutionized the whaling industry with the invention of the exploding harpoon gun and by using steam and diesel powered factory ships and catcher boats.. **The whaling industry began to focus on blue whales after 1900.**
- **A single 90-foot blue whale could yield up to 120 barrels of oil**, and the blues were killed by the thousands. The slaughter peaked in 1931 when over 29,000 were killed in one season by the USA whaling industry. And, belatedly, the **International Whaling Commission (IWC) banned all hunting of blue whales in 1966** and gave them worldwide protection. Recovery has been extremely slow, and only in the last few years have there been signs that their numbers may be increasing. **99% of blue whales were killed during whaling efforts.**
- Presently there are thought to be **six thousand** blue whales left in the world with the Atlantic stock on the verge of extinction, but only being 3-400 hundred animals and only 19 calves born in the last 30 years

## Bottlenose Dolphins



### Facts about Bottlenose dolphins

- They cooperate for calf rising, when usually one dolphin helps the mother to take care of the calves, very much like a midwife.
- Dolphins consume a variety of prey including fish, squid and crustaceans.

### Threats and population

- There is an estimate of 600,000 of bottlenose dolphins in the wild. One of the biggest threats to dolphin population is accidental catching from fishing nets, habitat degradation and hunting for human consumption

and catching the dolphins for entertainment. **In the small town of Taiji, Japan, 23,000 dolphins are killed each year.**

- Live capture of common bottlenose dolphins for public display; have occurred in several parts of the species range. **Worldwide estimates of removal are unavailable.**
  - In the northern Adriatic Sea bottlenose dolphins have declined by at least 50% over the past 50 years.
  - Captive environments are not natural for bottlenose dolphins . These animals have shorted life expectancy's and **have been known to commit suicide** by banging their heads against the sides of pools due to stress and depression.

## Humpback Whale



### Facts about humpback whales

- Humpback whales grow to be about 52 feet long, weighing 30-50 tonnes.
- Humpback whales are seasonal baleen feeders.
- An average-sized humpback whale will eat 4,400-5,500 pounds of plankton, krill and small schooling fish each day during the feeding season in cold waters.
- Humpback whales are the noisiest and most imaginative whales when it comes to songs. They have long, varied, complex, eerie, and beautiful songs that include recognizable sequences of squeaks, grunts, and other sounds.

### Threats and population

- Humpback whales are an **endangered species**. As their feeding, mating, and calving grounds are close to shore and because they are slow swimmers, the humpback whales were **an easy target for early whalers**.
- The International Whaling Commission (IWC) gave them worldwide protection status in 1966, but there were large illegal kills by the Soviets until the 1970's. It is believed in one source that a number of about **30,000-40,000 at present, or about 30-35% of the original population**.
- The **Japanese still hunt humpback whales** "for scientific purposes"

## Sperm Whale



### Facts about sperm whales

- The sperm whale has a large geographic range. It can be seen in nearly all marine regions, from the equator to high latitudes, but is generally found in continental slope or deeper water.
- Its main source of food is medium-sized deep water squid, but it also feeds on species of fish, skate, octopus, and smaller squid. A sperm whale consumes about one ton of food each day.
- Whales reach sexual maturity at approximately 33-39 feet and 10 years or more of age but do not seem to take an actual part in breeding until their late 20's. Females reach sexual maturity at 27-29 feet and 7-13 years of age.
- Sperm whales are found in all oceans of the world. The males, alone or in groups, are found in higher latitudes. From time to time they migrate toward lower latitudes, and only the largest mature males appear to enter the breeding grounds close to the equator.

### Threats and population

- Selective killing of the larger breeding-age males over many years upset the male-to-female ratio, and **the birth rate has seriously declined** in some populations. The average size of sperm whales killed noticeably decreased during the last 40 years of hunting.
- **The pre-whaling global population of about one million had been reduced by about 29% by 1880 through “open-boat” whaling, and then to approximately 360,000 by the 1990s** through modern whaling, although much uncertainty is associated with all these estimate there is no direct evidence that any part of the population has increased since the end of large-scale whaling in about 1980.





### WHAT WE CAN DO

**We can** set up programmes like the AWF whale and dolphin volunteer initiative in Tenerife at various locations around the world, facilitating research, conservation and education work.

Sri Lanka (Blue Whale, Sperm Whale), Sierra Leone/ Ghana/ Cape Verde (Humpback Whales), Argentina (Right Whales) are all possible programmes that **we can** set up.