

# Blue whale

## Blue whale

Temporal range:

**Middle Pleistocene** - recent



Adult blue whale  
(*Balaenoptera musculus*)

Size compared to an average human

## Conservation status

**Endangered** (IUCN 3.1)<sup>[1]</sup>

**Endangered** (ESA)<sup>[2]</sup>

## Scientific classification

[Edit this classification](#)

Domain: [Eukaryota](#)  
Kingdom: [Animalia](#)  
Phylum: [Chordata](#)  
Class: [Mammalia](#)  
Order: [Artiodactyla](#)  
Infraorder: [Cetacea](#)  
Family: [Balaenopteridae](#)  
Genus: [Balaenoptera](#)  
Species: ***B. musculus***

## Binomial name

***Balaenoptera musculus***

(Linnaeus, 1758)

## Subspecies

- *B. m. brevipcauda* Ichihara, 1966
- ?*B. m. indica* Blyth, 1859
- *B. m. intermedia* Burmeister, 1871
- *B. m. musculus* Linnaeus, 1758

Blue whale range (in blue)

## Synonyms

- *Balaena musculus*  
Linnaeus, 1758
- *Balaenoptera gibbar*  
[Scoresby](#), 1820
- *Pterobalaena gigas*  
[Van Beneden](#), 1861
- *Physalus latirostris*  
[Flower](#), 1864
- *Sibbaldius borealis*  
[Gray](#), 1866
- *Flowerius gigas*  
[Lilljeborg](#), 1867
- *Sibbaldius sulfureus*  
[Cope](#), 1869
- *Balaenoptera sibbaldii*  
[Sars](#), 1875

The **blue whale** (*Balaenoptera musculus*) is a marine mammal of the suborder of [baleen whales](#) (called Mysticeti). They grow to be about 30 m (98 ft) long. The biggest blue whale found was 190 t (210 tons) and measured 98 ft (30 m) long.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Larger specimens have been measured at 110 ft (34 m), but never been weighed. This makes blue whales the largest [animals](#) to ever live on [Earth](#), even bigger than the largest [dinosaurs](#).

The blue whale eats mostly very tiny creatures, like [krill](#), which had decreased in population by 19%-29% due to the consumption of whales. These inch-long, [shrimp](#)-like [crustacean](#) swim in large swarms. In the [Antarctic](#) summer, there are so many of these krill that they turn the waters [orange](#). A blue whale can eat 8 to 10 t (7.9 to 9.8 long tons; 8.8 to 11.0 short tons) of krill every day,<sup>[5]</sup> which had caused a rapid weight gain in whales, especially in the humpback whales.<sup>[6]</sup>

The blue whale's body is long and slender. It can be various shades of bluish-grey above and somewhat lighter underneath.<sup>[7]</sup> There are at least three different [subspecies](#): *B. m. musculus* of the North Atlantic and North Pacific, *B. m. intermedia* of the [Southern Ocean](#) and *B. m. brevicauda* (also known as the [pygmy blue whale](#)) found in the [Indian Ocean](#) and [South Pacific Ocean](#). *B. m. indica*, found in the Indian Ocean, may be another subspecies. As with other baleen whales, its diet consists almost exclusively of small krill.<sup>[8]</sup>

Blue whales were once numerous around the world. In the nineteenth century, they were hunted almost to [extinction](#) by [whalers](#). They were finally protected by the International Community in 1966. A 2002 report estimated there were 5,000 to 12,000 blue whales worldwide,<sup>[9]</sup> located in at least five groups. More recent research into the Pygmy subspecies suggests this may be an underestimate.<sup>[10]</sup> Before whaling, the largest population was in the Antarctic, numbering approximately 239,000 (range 202,000 to 311,000).<sup>[11]</sup> There remain only much smaller (around 2,000) concentrations in each

of the eastern North [Pacific](#), [Antarctic](#), and Indian Ocean groups. There are two more groups in the North [Atlantic](#), and at least two in the [Southern Hemisphere](#). The North Atlantic group of Blue Whales can be seen in the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park near Tadoussac QC, Canada.<sup>[12]</sup>

## References

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[Wikispecies](#) has information on: ***Balaenoptera musculus***.

Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***Balaenoptera musculus***.

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[1]

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