

Marine Mammal Incident Reporting Hotline 1-800-465-4336

Please report sick, injured, distressed or dead marine mammals and sea turtles.

Whale, dolphin & porpoise identification guide



wild whales
b.c. cetacean sightings network



HARBOUR PORPOISE

Phocoena phocoena

LENGTH Less than 2 m/ 6 ft.

DORSAL FIN Dark, triangular

APPEARANCE Dark grey back with lighter underside

BEHAVIOUR Inconspicuous, travels slowly;
generally alone or in groups of 2–3



DALL'S PORPOISE

Phocoenoides dalli

LENGTH Up to 2.2m/ 5–7ft.

DORSAL FIN Triangular with white trailing edge

APPEARANCE Black, with large white flanks; small hump
on back before tail flukes

BEHAVIOUR Usually in groups of 2–10;
creates "rooster-tail" of spray when swimming quickly



PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN

Lagenorhynchus obliquidens

LENGTH Up to 2.5 m/ 8 ft.

DORSAL FIN Sharply curved, bi-coloured

APPEARANCE Dark back, white underside, grey side streaks

BEHAVIOUR Only small, local cetacean that leaps
completely clear of water; usually in groups of 50 or more



KILLER WHALE

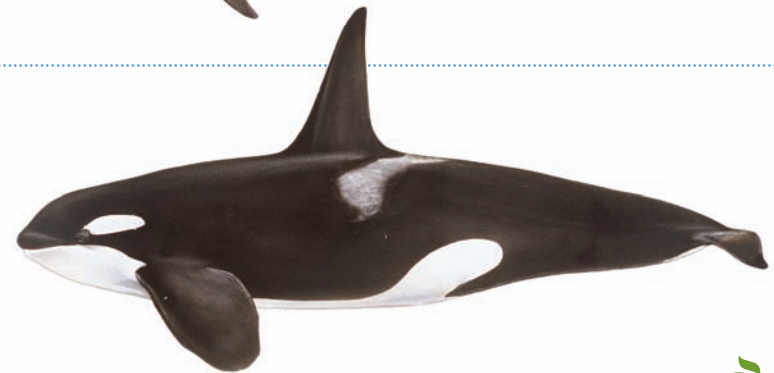
Orcinus orca

LENGTH 6–9 m/ 18–28 ft.

DORSAL FIN Black, triangular in females and calves;
tall, distinctive in adult males

APPEARANCE Black body with white underside; grey
saddle patch behind dorsal fin; white eye patch

BEHAVIOUR Usually in groups of 3–25; bushy blows
visible in cold weather



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Photos by J. Ford and A. Morton. Illustrations by A. Denbeigh, not to scale.

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MINKE WHALE

Balaenoptera acutorostrata

LENGTH 7–10m/ 23–33ft.

DORSAL FIN Curved, far back on body

APPEARANCE Dark grey to black colouration; white band on topside of pectoral fins; pointed head with prominent noseridge

BEHAVIOUR Usually solitary; blows rarely visible; surfaces 1–2 times between dives; elusive



GREY WHALE

Eschrichtius robustus

LENGTH 12–14 m/ 39–46 ft.

DORSAL FIN No dorsal fin; knuckle-like bumps on lower back

APPEARANCE Mottled grey colour; patches of barnacles

BEHAVIOUR Low, bushy, heart- or v-shaped blow; occasionally lifts tail flukes when diving; often feeds close to shore



HUMPBACK WHALE

Megaptera novaeangliae

LENGTH 11–15 m/ 37–50 ft.

DORSAL FIN Small, nubby fin with broad base

APPEARANCE Black body; bumps or knobs on head; long pectoral fins with white underside

BEHAVIOUR Medium-sized, bushy blow; usually surfaces 2–5 times between deep dives; often raises tail flukes on final dive



FIN WHALE

Balaenoptera physalis

LENGTH 18–22 m/ 59–72 ft.

DORSAL FIN Sickle-shaped; relatively large; very far back on body

APPEARANCE Right lower lip is white, while left is dark;

BEHAVIOUR Blowhole and dorsal fin not visible simultaneously; tall, narrow blow; rarely lifts tail flukes when diving



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SPERM WHALE

Physeter macrocephalus

LENGTH 11–18 m/ 36–59 ft.

DORSAL FIN Triangular/rounded hump, followed by knuckles

APPEARANCE Wrinkled dark skin; huge square-shaped head; blowhole very close to front of head

BEHAVIOUR Low, bushy blow, angled to the left; lifts broad triangular tail flukes high in air before diving



SEI WHALE

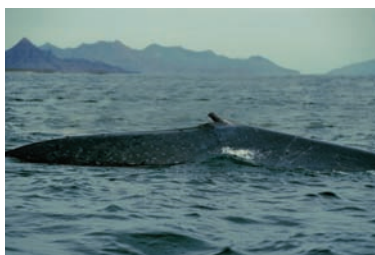
Balaenoptera borealis

LENGTH 12–14 m/ 39–46 ft.

DORSAL FIN Slender and erect; less than 2/3 from front of body

APPEARANCE Blue grey, dark grey or black back; blowhole and dorsal fin visible simultaneously when surfacing

BEHAVIOUR Narrow, cloud-like blow; rarely exposes tail flukes



BLUE WHALE

Balaenoptera musculus

LENGTH 20–25 m/ 65–83 ft.

DORSAL FIN Variable shape; very small relative to body

APPEARANCE Blue-grey, mottled colouring; dorsal fin not seen until well after blow ends

BEHAVIOUR Blows 9 m/ 30ft tall; often exposes tail flukes when diving



NORTH PACIFIC RIGHT WHALE

Eubalaena japonica

LENGTH 11–15 m/ 37–50 ft.

DORSAL FIN None

APPEARANCE Dark, rotund body; large head covered in white, irregular growths (callosities); no dorsal fin

BEHAVIOUR Wide, V-shaped blow; may raise tail flukes when diving

Note: North Pacific Right Whales have not been seen in BC waters in 40yrs. If you see one, please call 1866 I SAW ONE



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Sea turtle of B.C. identification guide



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Loggerhead and Olive Ridley turtles have not yet been recorded in B.C. waters but have been seen in Washington and Alaska.



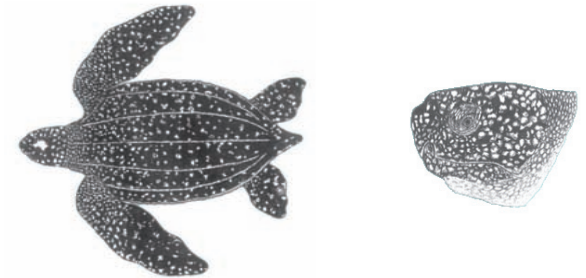
LEATHERBACK TURTLE

Dermochelys coriacea
(The most commonly seen sea turtle in B.C. waters)

TOTAL LENGTH Up to 3m/ 9 ft.

COLOUR Black, with white spots

FEATURES Very large; ridges along back (looks like the bottom of a boat); shell tapers to a point at rear end



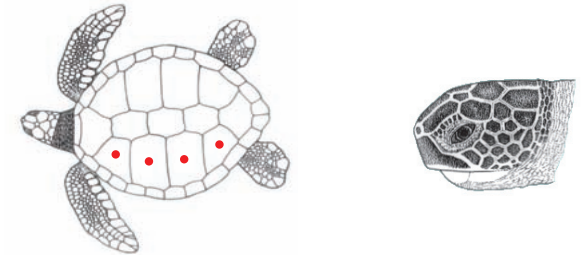
GREEN TURTLE

Chelonia mydas

TOTAL LENGTH Up to 1.5 m/ 5 ft.

COLOUR Dark greyish green with light blotches on shell

FEATURES Shell tapered at rear; small head relative to body; four costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



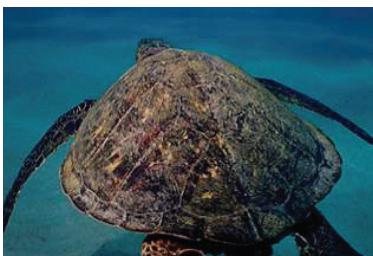
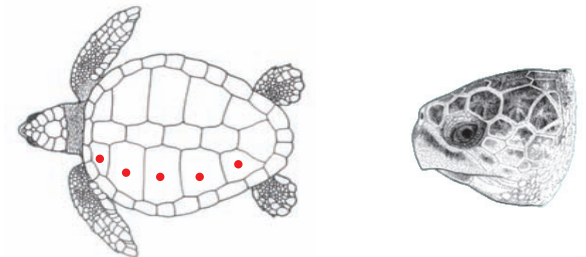
LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

Caretta caretta

TOTAL LENGTH 0.3-1.0 m/ 1-3 ft. (juvenile only)

COLOUR Reddish brown

FEATURES Large head and jaws; five costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



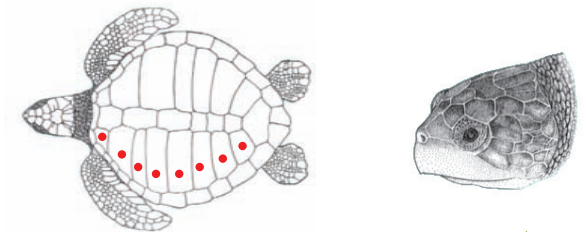
OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE

Lepidochelys olivacea

TOTAL LENGTH Up to 1m/ 3 ft.

COLOUR Olive/ grey

FEATURES Shell width equal to or greater than shell length (highly domed shell); six to nine costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



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