

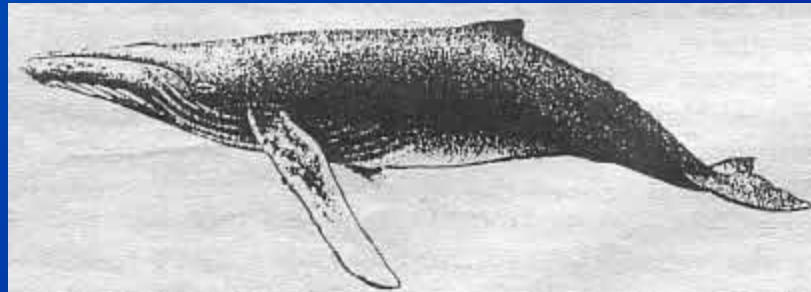
Humpback Whales

Background Information



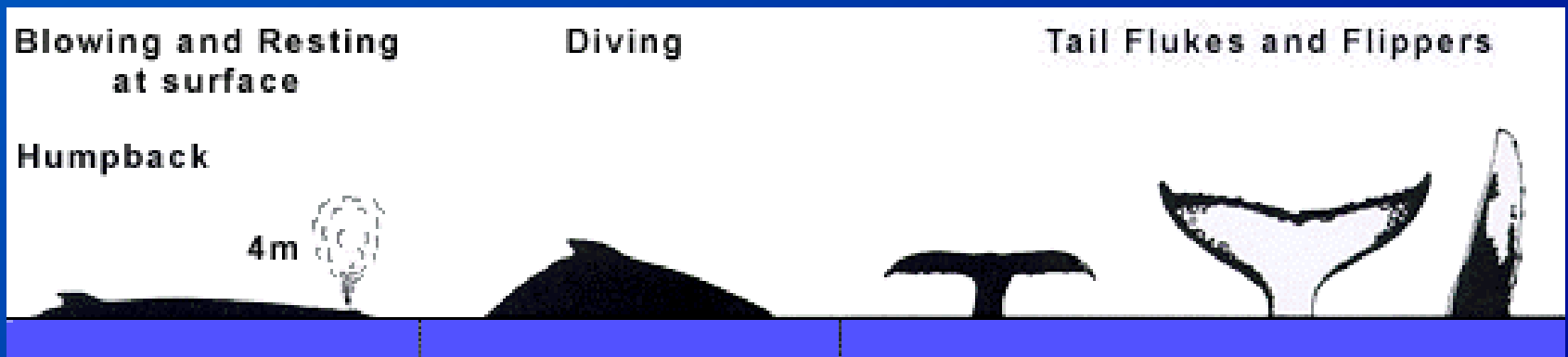
Physical Description

- The upper body color is black while the underside of the flippers, belly and flanks can be white or black. The tail has a ragged edge and on the head are bumps and knobs, called tubercles, with barnacles growing on them.



Physical Description

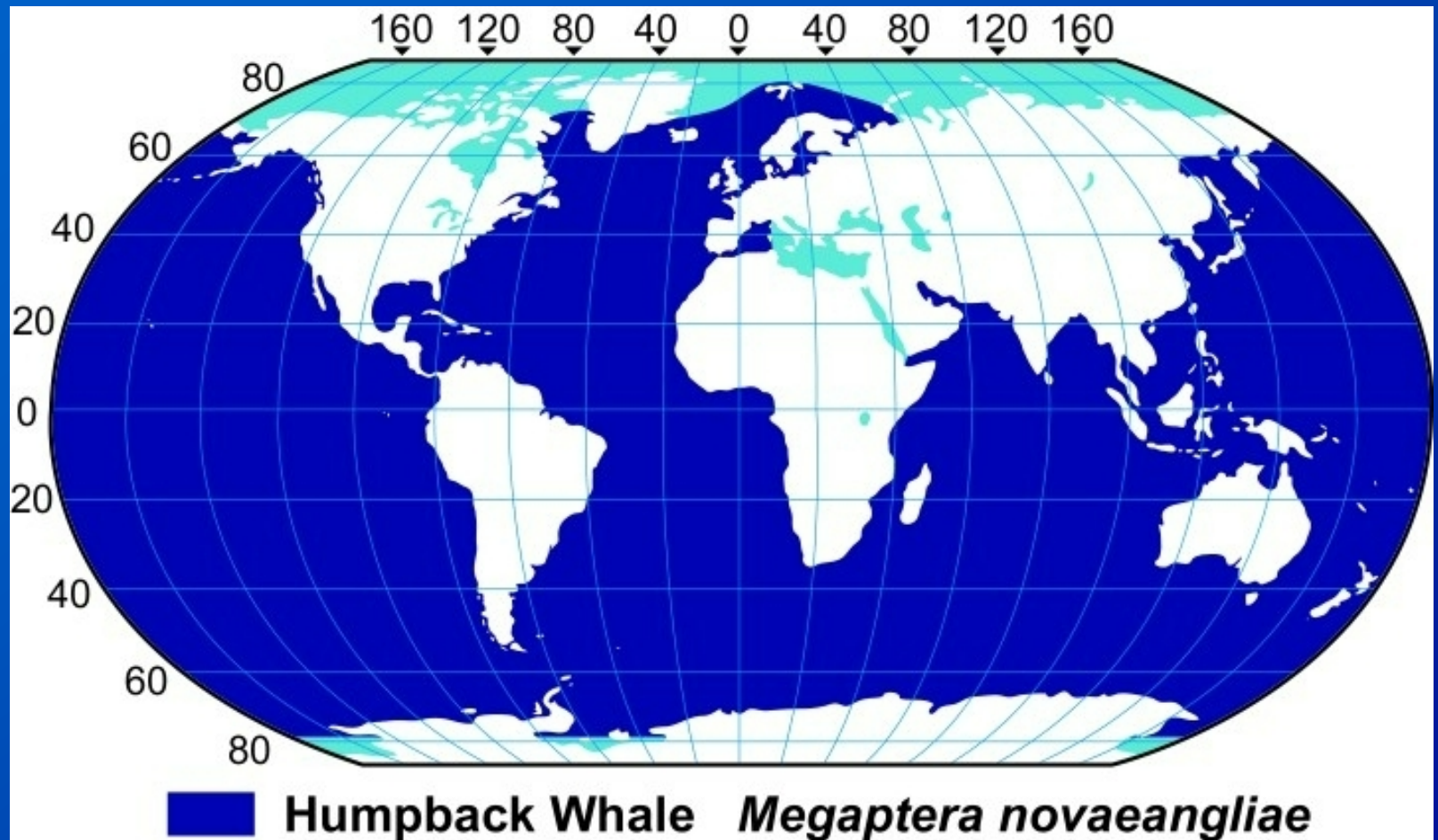
- Have an average length of 15 meters.
- Have the longest flippers of all the whales.
- Their flippers (pectoral fins) make up to one-third of the total body length.



Distribution

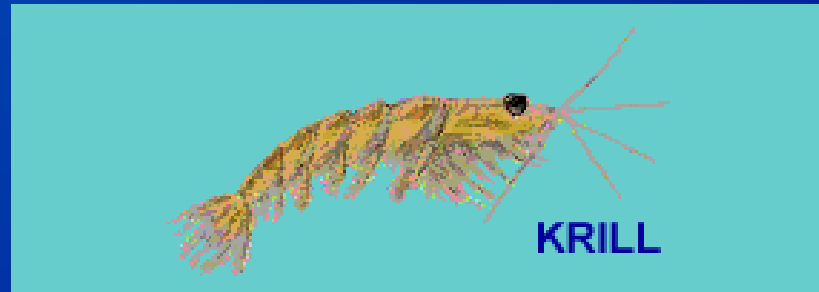
- Humpback whales are found in all of the world's oceans.
- Most populations of humpback whales follow a regular migration route.
- They summer in temperate and polar waters for feeding, and winter in tropical waters.

Distribution



Feeding Patterns

- Humpback whales feed on
 - krill, small shrimp-like crustaceans
 - various kinds of small fish.
- Each whale eats up to 1 and 1/2 tons of food a day.



Baleen



- They have a series of fringed overlapping plates hanging from each side of the upper jaw – the baleen
- During feeding, large amounts of water and food are taken into the mouth.
- As the mouth closes water is expelled through the baleen plates, trapping the food on the inside to be swallowed.

Bubblenet Feeding

- a cooperative hunting technique used by humpback whales
- a pod of whales dive deep under a school of fish
- they form a circle
- blow their breath out simultaneously, forming a net of bubbles.



National Geographic Photo

Bubblenet Feeding

- Within the ring each humpback has a specialized task
 - Some blow the bubbles
 - Others dive down and herd the fish towards the surface.
 - Another group make noises to concentrate the fish and force them up towards the surface into the bubble net

Bubblenet Feeding

- You can view a video of a pod bubblenet feeding at
 - http://www.arkive.org/species/GES/mammals/Megaptera_novaeangliae/Megaptera_novaeangliae_08b.html?movietype=wmMed

Bubblenet Feeding

- You can view a video of a pod of bubble net feeding at
[http://www.arkive.org/species/GES/mammals/Megaptera novaeangliae/Megaptera novaeangliae_o8a.html?movietype=wmMed](http://www.arkive.org/species/GES/mammals/Megaptera_novaeangliae/Megaptera_novaeangliae_o8a.html?movietype=wmMed)

Breaching

- With 2 or 3 beats of its huge tail the whale hurls itself up through the surface sometimes clearing the water completely, and then falls on its back with a tremendous splash.



Tail Lobbing and Flipper Slapping



Tail Lobbing and Flipper Slapping

- Humpbacks engage in
 - "tail lobbing" - raising their huge fluke out of the water and then slapping it on the surface
 - and "flipper slapping" (using their flippers to slap the water).
 - It is possible that these behaviors are important in communication between humpbacks.

http://www.arkive.org/species/GES/mammals/Megaptera_novaeangliae/Megaptera_novaeae_n12.html?movietype=wmMed

Endangered Whales

- Because their humpbacks come close to shore and since they are slow swimmers, the humpback whales were an easy target for early whalers.
- By 1973 the North Pacific population was estimated to have been reduced to around 1,000 animals by decades of commercial whaling.

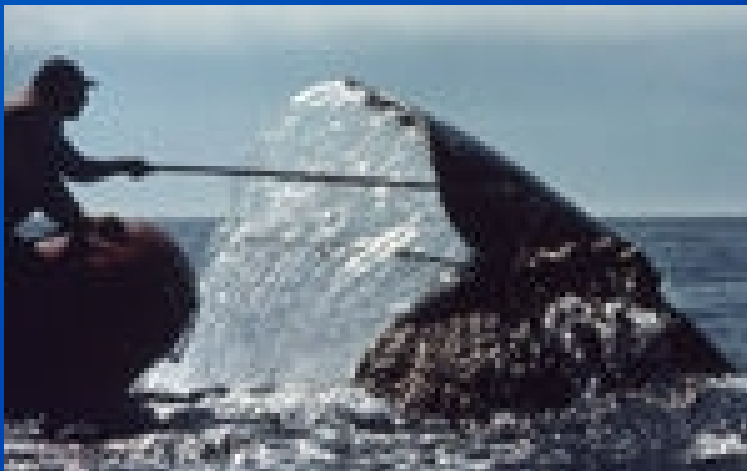
Endangered Whales

- 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 they number about 30,000-40,000 at present, or about 30-35% of the original population.



Current Threats

- Entanglement in debris/fishing gear
- Collisions with ships
- Noise and chemical pollution
- Habitat destruction
- Prey depletion (lack of food) from over-fishing



Rescue from fishing gear in New England