

Common Whale Species Found Off the Coast of California



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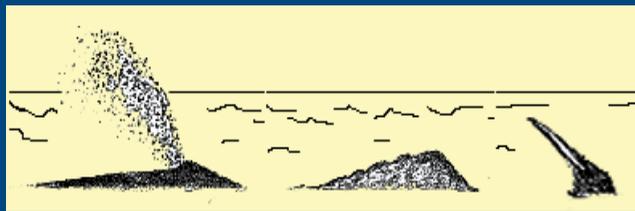
E. Crapo

Gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*): Body mottled gray; frequently with whale lice on head; no dorsal fin; bumps, ridges or knuckles on tail stock; heart-shaped blow; flukes raised high above the surface before deep dives; up to 46 feet in length; migrates from Alaska to Baja California; can be seen in California from October through July (most likely December through June); females with accompanying calves can be seen during late winter and early spring.

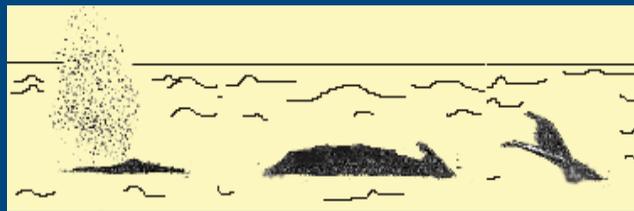
Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*): body dark gray with black and white patches on underside; long white and black flippers; head covered with knobs or nodules; two-step dorsal fin; single rounded bushy blow; flukes raised before deep dives; up to 52 feet in length; migrates from coastal Central America and Mexico to southern British Columbia; commonly seen in California in summer and fall; endangered.

Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*): body mottled bluish-gray; very small dorsal fin situated far on the back; flukes often raised before dives; tall, columnar blow; up to 85 feet in length (the largest living animal); migrates from coastal Central America and Mexico to Oregon; most commonly seen in California from May through September; endangered.

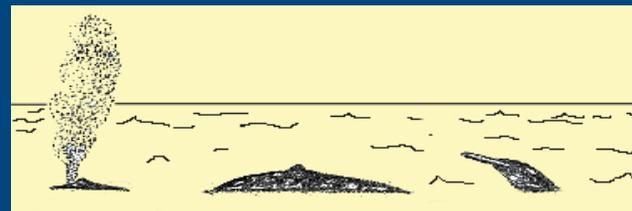
Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*): Body solid gray to black above and white below with a chevron pattern behind head often visible from above; long streamlined body; sharp, variably shaped dorsal fin; blow tall and shaped like an inverted cone; rarely raises flukes on long dives; up to 79 feet in length; the second-largest species of whale; can be seen year-round, but most often seen during the summer and winter months; endangered.



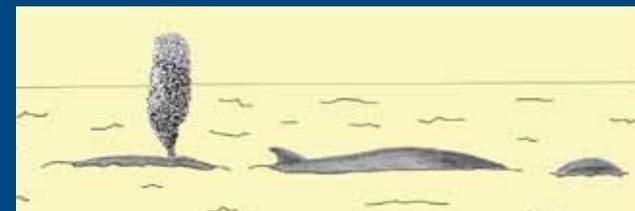
Blow is heart-shaped from a head-on view. No dorsal fin; knuckles are visible prior to dive. Flukes lifted high in the air for deep dives.



Blow is round and bushy. Dorsal fin drops below surface; tail arches prior to dive. Flukes are lifted high above surface prior to dive.



Blow is tall and columnar. Dorsal fin visible briefly prior to arching back before dive. Flukes raised slightly above the surface at a shallow angle.



Blow is tall and shaped like an inverted cone. Dorsal fin visible prior to dive. Rarely raises flukes.

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FISHERIES
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CALIFORNIA
WHALE
WATCHING
GUIDELINES



For more information or questions about these guidelines, contact:

**NOAA Fisheries Service
Southwest Regional Office**

(562) 980-3232

<http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov>

To report incidents of harassment, please contact:

**Southwest Region
NOAA Office of Law
Enforcement**

(562) 980-4050

-or-

**NOAA Law Enforcement
Hotline**

(800) 853-1964

To report an injured or entangled whale, please call:

**1-877-SOS-WHALE
(767-9425)**

**or hail the U.S. Coast Guard
on VHF Channel 16.**

Whale watching can be a positive, enriching and educational experience when conducted safely and responsibly.

NOAA Fisheries Service recommends the following guidelines to help keep you and the whales safe on your next boating trip.

1. Be alert and avoid disturbing whales and changing their normal behavior.
2. ALWAYS attempt to stay 100 yards away from a whale.
3. If a situation arises where you cannot avoid a whale or whales by 100 yards, DO NOT:
 - Move into the path of a whale
 - Move faster than a whale; DO operate at a no-wake speed.
 - Make erratic speed or directional changes, unless to avoid collision with a whale.
 - Get between two whales
 - Chase any whales
 - Feed any whales

NOAA Fisheries Service is responsible for protecting whales under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA). California offers a unique opportunity for the public to view these wild, majestic animals in their natural habitat all year long.

However, efforts by the general public to closely approach or otherwise interact with whales can lead to harassment, which is illegal under the MMPA and ESA. Harassment is considered to be an act of pursuit, torment or annoyance which has the potential to injure a whale or disrupt its natural behavior.

From a biological and management standpoint, the harassment of whales by the general public continues to be a concern. In addition, there are significant public safety issues to consider, as people have been injured while attempting to interact too closely with whales in their natural habitat.