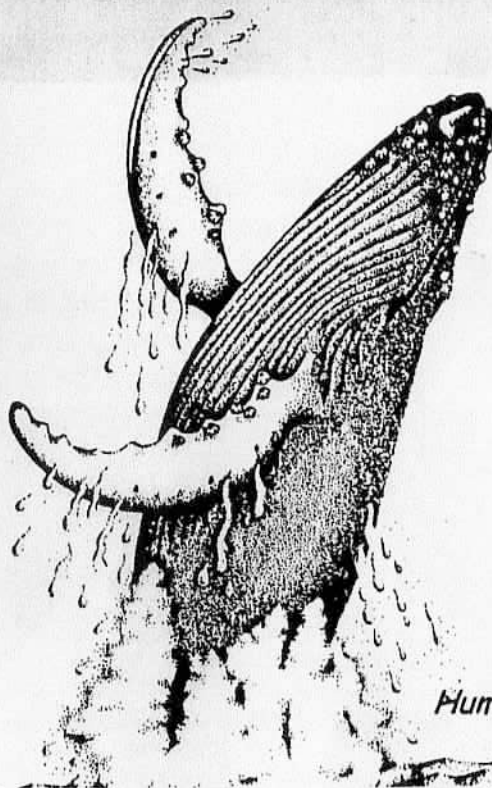


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The Most Frequently Sighted

# Whales

at Point Lobos State Reserve



*Humpback whale*

California State Parks does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should call

Point Lobos State Reserve at  
831-624-4909.

This brochure is available in alternate formats.

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## WHEN AND WHERE TO LOOK

Whales can be seen off the coastline of the Reserve at any time of the year, although some months are better than others. A flat sea on an overcast day is good for whale watching because there is less glare from the sun. Elevated locales with broad vistas of open ocean are best and are found throughout the Reserve. Refer to your map.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Scan the surface of the water all the way to the horizon and look for a waterspout or a cloud of condensation that may hang in the air for a few seconds. These are created when the whale exhales. Whales are mammals (as are we humans), and must breathe air in order to survive. Their breathing process takes place at the surface, and enormous quantities of air are exchanged in a matter of a few seconds. Once you locate a "**blow**", stay with it. Where you see one blow, you will see others. Occasionally, a whale will assume a vertical posture in the water with its head partially out of the water. This is referred to as **Spyhopping**. Sometimes the whale will rise out of the water (often 1/2 to 3/4 of its length). This is referred to as **Breaching**. If a whale breaches once, it very likely will do it again. Keep watching!

## PACIFIC GRAY WHALE

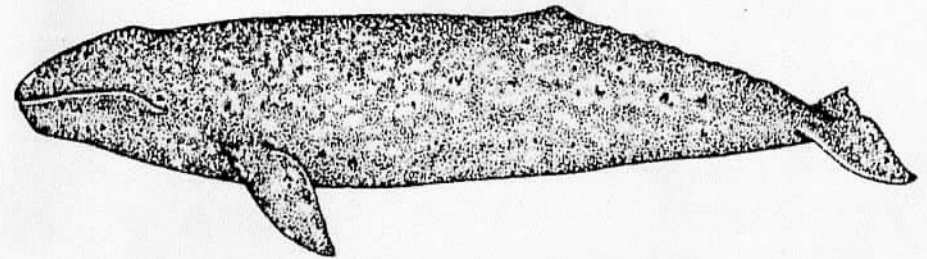
*Eschrichtius robustus*

The gray whale is the most commonly seen whale at Point Lobos. They make their appearance in December in the course of migrating from their Arctic feeding grounds to the warm water lagoons of Baja California, Mexico

With a round trip of approximately 10,000 to 12,000 miles, this migration is one of the longest that is made by mammals.

The peak of this southerly migration usually occurs around January 15th, but can be a few weeks earlier or later. Birthing and mating activities sometimes occur on the trip south, but usually take place in the warmer climate of their destination. The 15 foot calf has a better start in life if it is born in the warm water of a sheltered lagoon. After the birthing process is complete, and/or after mating, the northerly trip starts in February, peaks in March and can continue into April. The impregnated females and the males generally leave first with the mother and calf pairs taking more time in order to allow for growth of the calf.

Gray whales can be seen through May with the mother and calf pairs hugging the coast to avoid orcas which prey on the calves.



Adult gray whales weigh 35 to 45 tons and are 40 to 50 feet long. They usually blow 3 to 5 times in 15 to 30 second intervals before raising their tails (flukes) for a deep dive. A gray whale can stay underwater for up to 15 minutes and can swim 3 to 6 miles per hour,

The gray whale filters its food through **baleen** in its mouth. It has no teeth. Both the Information Station and the Whalers Cabin have specimens of baleen that you may touch. In addition, The Whaling Station Museum has an

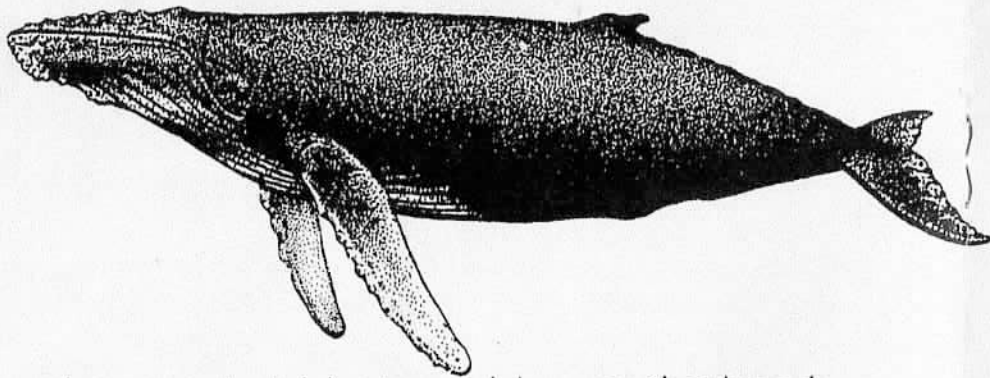
The Whalers Cabin has specimens of baleen which you may touch. In addition, the Whaling Station Museum next to the Whalers Cabin, has an assortment of whalebones on the grounds. Refer to your map.

There is great concern for the gray whale population, which has seen a dramatic decline in recent years. In 1972, at a time when the species was near extinction, the Marine Mammal Protection Act was initiated and the population rebounded. It peaked in 1998 at approximately 27,000 animals, but has declined to approximately 23,000 animals. Scientists have been unable to determine the cause of this decline.

## HUMPBACK WHALE

### *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Within the last ten years, the humpback whale has become a more frequent visitor to Monterey Bay and Point Lobos. As early as March and on through December, humpbacks can be seen. They forage for krill and small baitfish, which are plentiful during these months. They



can be very entertaining to watch because they breach often, and slap their tails (lob-tailing) or their flippers

on the water. Their flippers make quite a display because they are very long and their coloration usually includes a lot of white along with black.

The humpback whales seen in the Monterey area will spend the winter months in the warmer waters of Mexico or Central America where they will calve and mate. They generally travel in groups (pods), but occasionally will be seen traveling alone. The humpbacks are noted for their beautiful songs that can last from a few minutes duration to 30 minutes or more, and occasionally for hours. A tape of humpback songs can be heard at the Whalers Station Museum.

The length of the adult humpback averages 54 feet, and their weight averages 45 tons.

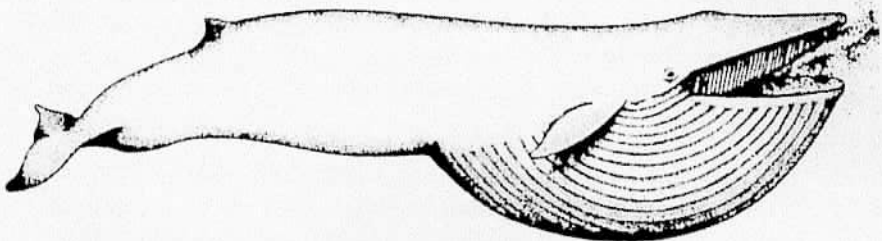
There is a large section of humpback whale baleen mounted on the side of the Whaling Station Museum at Whalers Cove.

## BLUE WHALE

### *Balaenoptera musculus*

The blue whale is the largest mammal to have ever lived, and still inhabits all of the world's oceans. It had been hunted to near extinction by the early 1900's and is now listed as endangered with an estimated population of 5,000 worldwide. The only habitat where the blue whales are considered to be thriving lies along the coast of California and West Mexico, where some 2,200 animals reside. These animals also migrate to warmer waters, most notably along the coast of Central America, to give birth and to breed in the winter.

Blue whales can be seen occasionally from Point Lobos during the months of July, August and September. Sometimes they can be seen in the company of humpback whales, probably feeding. When in the company of humpbacks, the blue whales can be identified by their tall narrow spout, (20 feet or higher), compared to the spouts



of the humpback, which are generally only 10 feet in height, thicker, and slightly heart shaped. Most often, the blue whales travel singly or in pairs.

Blue whales are baleen whales and feed almost exclusively on krill, which is a small (about 1 inch) red shrimp-like crustacean found most frequently in deep, cold water. During the summer feeding season, a blue whale may consume 4 tons (40 million krill) in a day.

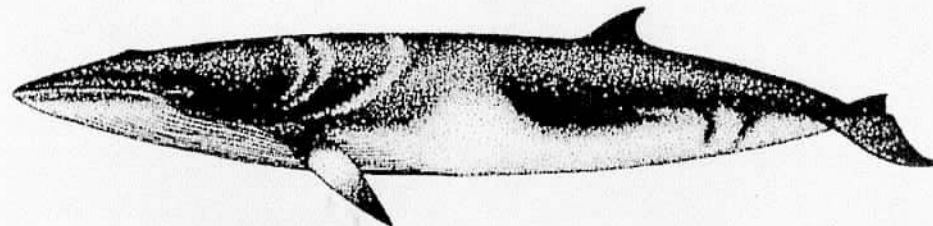
The largest blue whale on record is 110 feet in length. The average blue whale is 75 to 80 feet in length, and weighs about 110 tons. Females are typically larger than males.

## MINKE WHALE

### *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

The minke whale is the smallest baleen whale and quite common in all the oceans of the world. The fact that this whale is small, (27 to 35 feet in length), weighs 10 to 15 tons, and usually swims alone with a rarely visible spout,

and prominent, and will appear at the same time as the blow hole. Its body is dark above, often with a gray chevron crossing the back behind the head, and white underneath. The minke whale does not spend much time on the surface; it breathes about seven times and dives without showing its flukes. Typically it has a white patch on its flippers, but the flippers can also be completely black or white. It eats krill and small fish



Minke whales have generally been thought to be too small to warrant hunting. Japan and Norway have hunted them and continue to do so. Past research has not been extensive, due primarily to their elusive nature. As hunting continues, more research is being done. Little is yet known of their breeding grounds or their reproductive strategies. Their principal predators are man and orca.

## ORCA OR KILLER WHALE

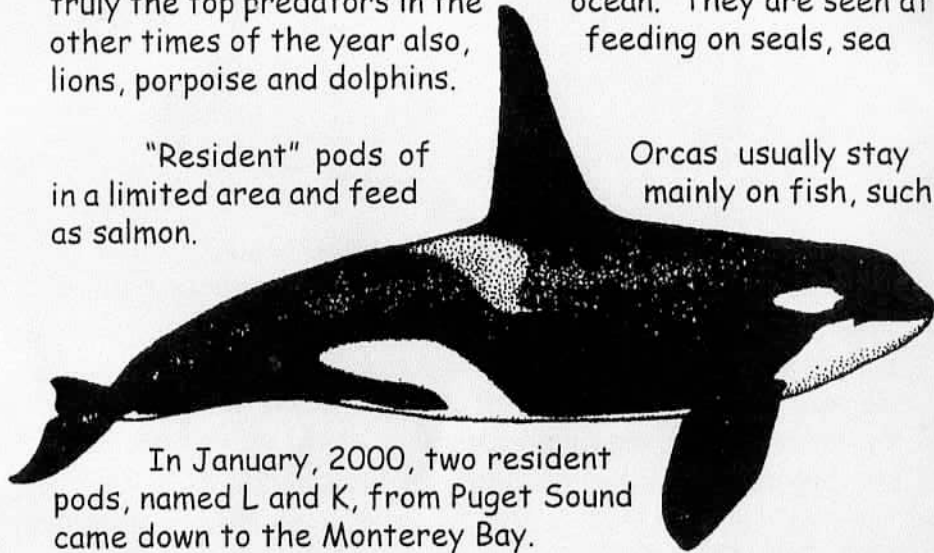
### *Orcinus orca*

Killer? Yes! Whale? No!! The orca is being included in this brochure because of its common name. However, the orca is actually the largest member of the dolphin family. The striking black and white pattern on its body makes it a beautiful sight! An adult can be up to 32 feet long and weigh up to 11 tons. Its large prominent, dorsal fin (6 feet on males) makes it one of the easiest marine mammals to identify. The male orca's fin is erect and almost spike-like; the female's is slightly curved and smaller. The orca has 10 to 14 pairs of sharp teeth in the upper and lower jaw. No documented cases exist of wild orca using these teeth on humans.

The Orca can be found in all the world's oceans. There are three genetically different groups of Orcas that visit our area. One group, called "transients", travel great distances and feed mostly on marine mammals, including whales. There are known transient Orcas that return every spring to prey on the gray whale calves migrating north with their mothers. The transient Orcas are truly the top predators in the ocean. They are seen at other times of the year also, feeding on seals, sea lions, porpoise and dolphins.

"Resident" pods of Orcas usually stay in a limited area and feed mainly on fish, such as salmon.

Orcas usually stay in a limited area and feed mainly on fish, such as salmon.



In January, 2000, two resident pods, named L and K, from Puget Sound came down to the Monterey Bay.

In March 2003, members of the L pod were sighted again in Monterey Bay.

"Offshores" are Orcas that are seen mainly in winter and eat squid, fish and sharks. They travel in large groups for long distances.

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