



## **MAMMALS**

### **FINBACK WHALE**

#### **ABOUT**

The Finback Whale or Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) is the second largest whale in the world. Among the fastest of the great whales, it can reach a speed of 23 mph (37 km per hour). It is long and sleek with a v-shaped head that is flat on top. A single ridge extends from the blowhole to the tip of the upper jaw. There are 50 to 100 grooves on the underside of the body extending from under the lower jaw to its navel. Its most unusual characteristic is a white or creamy yellow color on the right side of the lower jaw and mottled black on the left. This species has a prominent, slightly curved dorsal fin located far back on its body. The flippers are small and tapered and its fluke (tail lobe) is wide at the base and pointed at the tips with a notch in the center. Northern hemisphere male Fin Whales measure up to 78ft (24m) and in the southern hemisphere up to 88ft (26.8m). Females are slightly larger than males and both sexes weigh between 50 and 70 tons (45,360-63,500 kg). Fin Whales feed mainly on small shrimp-like creatures called krill and other schooling fish, and consume up to 2 tons (1,814 kg) of food a day. As a baleen whale, it has fringed over-lapping plates instead of teeth. As it feeds, large volumes of water and food are drawn into the mouth. As the mouth closes the water is expelled through the baleen plates and trapped food can then be swallowed. Fin Whales are believed to mate during the winter and the female is pregnant for 11 months. At birth, the calf is 18 to 20ft long and they nurse for 6 to 7 months, separating from the mother after about a year.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Finback Whales are endangered. Their migration habits are not well understood, however, they are found in all oceans of the world. It is thought that they may migrate to subtropical waters for mating and calving during the winter months and to the colder areas of the Arctic and Antarctic for feeding during the summer. There is recent evidence that during winter Fin Whales may disperse to deep ocean water. Because of their speed and preference for the vast open seas, Fin Whales were protected from early whalers. However, with modern whaling methods they became easy victims. Between 1935 and 1965 as many as 30,000 Fin Whales were slaughtered per year. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) put them under full protection in 1966. Exact estimates of present populations are unavailable, but it is thought that there are about 40,000 in the northern hemisphere and 15,000-20,000 in the southern hemisphere – a huge reduction in original population levels.

For more detailed information visit: [www.acsonline.org](http://www.acsonline.org) or [www.blueoceansociety.org](http://www.blueoceansociety.org).

#### **TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

How many Fin Whales were killed every year between 1935 and 1965?

- a) 26,000
- b) 300,000
- c) 30,000
- d) 15,000

Answer is C.

