

GET TO KNOW

Humpback Whales



What to expect from this educational packet

This worksheet will teach you more about humpback whales and the important roles they play in our ecosystems! Through this packet, you will:

- Learn about the lifecycles and diverse populations of humpback whales
- Explore Indigenous cultural connections and reciprocal relationships with humpback whales
- Do some fun activities like drawing, crossword puzzles, and word searches.
- Reflect on what you've learned with our discussion questions

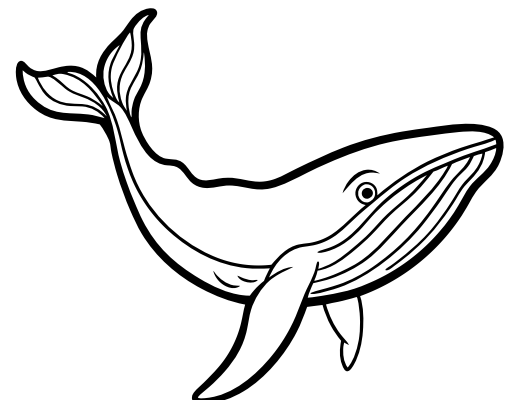
Introduction

The Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) is one of nature's greatest travellers. These mammals live in oceans throughout our planet. Humpback whales have one of the longest migrations on the planet. They can swim up to 8,000 kilometres each year! Humpback whales spend the warmer months feeding on small fish, shrimp, and krill, and build up fat that helps them survive through the more hostile winter months.

Unlike sharks, humpback whales do not have teeth. Instead, they have baleen, which acts as a large filter for food. Groups of humpback whales (pods) use a method called "bubble netting" to capture groups of fish to feed on. These whales will circle the schools of fish and blow bubbles to trap the fish within the circle and take turns feeding!

What do you know about Humpback Whales?

Before we dive in, take a moment to think about what you already know. What other whale species do you know about? What makes the humpback whale different from other beings? At the end of this packet, come back and see what new things you've learned!



Meet some humpback whales

There are at least four distinct humpback whale populations within the North Pacific:



Mexico

- Breeds in the pacific coast of Mexico and the Revillagigedo Islands
- Transits the Baja Cali Peninsula
- Feeds from Cali to the Aleutian Islands, Alaska



Central America population

- Breeds in pacific coast of Central America
 - Costa rica, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Hunduras and Nicaragua
- Feeds off the west coast of the US and southern BC



Hawaii population

- Breeds along Hawaiian Islands
- Feeds along the North Pacific
 - Aleutian Island/Bering Sea, Gulf of Alaska, Southeast Alaska, and Norhern British Columbia



Western population

- Breeds along Okinawa, Japan, the Phillipines and the Mariana Achipelego

There are 7 populations of Humpback Whales that are found in the Southern Hemisphere. All 7 populations feed in Antarctic or Sub-Antarctic waters.

Exploring Indigenous cultural connections

When learning about humpback whales, the ocean, and other beings that live in the ocean, it's important to recognize that these marine ecosystems have been cared for by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. Humpback whales are of deep cultural significance to many Indigenous groups around the world, and provide necessary sustenance for these communities. Below, we discuss some examples of Indigenous connections and reciprocal relationships with humpback whales.

The Mowachaht, Hesquiaht, Otsosat, Ahousaht, and Tla-o-qui-aht practiced "whaling". If you achieved success in whaling, it brought great honor to your family and respect within the community. The successful whaler received a celebration in honour of the sustenance they provided.

In traditional Māori culture, whales are believed to be supernatural beings who are descendants of Tangaroa, the god of the oceans. Whales were seen as guardians during long journeys across the sea, and there are stories told of dolphins and whales saving people's lives by carrying them to safety. For this reason, cetaceans are considered to be tapu (sacred) and are commonly recognized as taonga (treasure). Cetacean status as a taonga species has even been recognized in legislation. Until the arrival of Europeans in New Zealand, Māori people did not hunt large whales, but would use stranded whales for food, oil, and their bones for cultural artifacts, after the body had been treated ceremoniously.



This next section includes website links for deeper learning. To explore these resources, please visit sierraclub.bc.ca/humpackwhale-resource



Stewardship projects

All humpback whales are protected under the MMPA (Marine Mammal Protection Act), and five populations are protected under the ESA (Endangered Species Act). This includes:

- Reducing the risk of entanglement in fishing gear and marine debris
- Developing methods to reduce vessel strikes
- Responding to dead, injured, or entangled humpback whales
- Educating the whale watching/tourism industry and vessel operators on responsible viewing of humpback whales
- Partnering to implement the Whale SENSE program, a whale watching stewardship, education, and recognition program to increase wildlife viewing standards

Activities

Watch a tutorial
on how to draw
whales!



Draw a humpback whale!

With this activity, we encourage you to draw a humpback whale in its natural habitat. If you'd like a tutorial, you can watch our Learn to Draw: Humpback Whales lesson with the QR code above or visit sierraclub.bc.ca/draw.



Humpback Whale

WORD SEARCH

W E H F X J V J I S I V S X J
R F H S M O Z D G C V S O U B
Y E H V Y B R E A C H X X J O
P E X Y D Z B U B B L E S W G
S D W Q E B T H I S X U A W D
M I L B D I S T A N C E L W P
I N U N R Q Z H B F W K Y G L
G G M V G E F L I P P E R S A
R P M L L A E A L N F U A G N
A P T A O S F D K R I L L M K
T B P C M N J M I L E O W W T
I P O K H M G P Y N G C H X O
O W D A U X A R N Z G E D M N
N W D S O N G L S W T A I L Y
Z Z X X V Q B H Y U Z N B X K

Crotalus - The scientific name for rattlesnakes.

Oreganus - The species name of the Western rattlesnake.

Subspecies - A smaller group within a species, like the Northern Pacific rattlesnake.

Bask - What snakes do when they lie in the sun to warm up.

Nocturnal - An animal that is mostly active at night.

Strike - A fast movement snakes use to catch food.

Digest - What snakes do after eating to turn food into energy.

Migration - When snakes move between places during different seasons.

Blue-listed - A special label for animals that need help to survive.

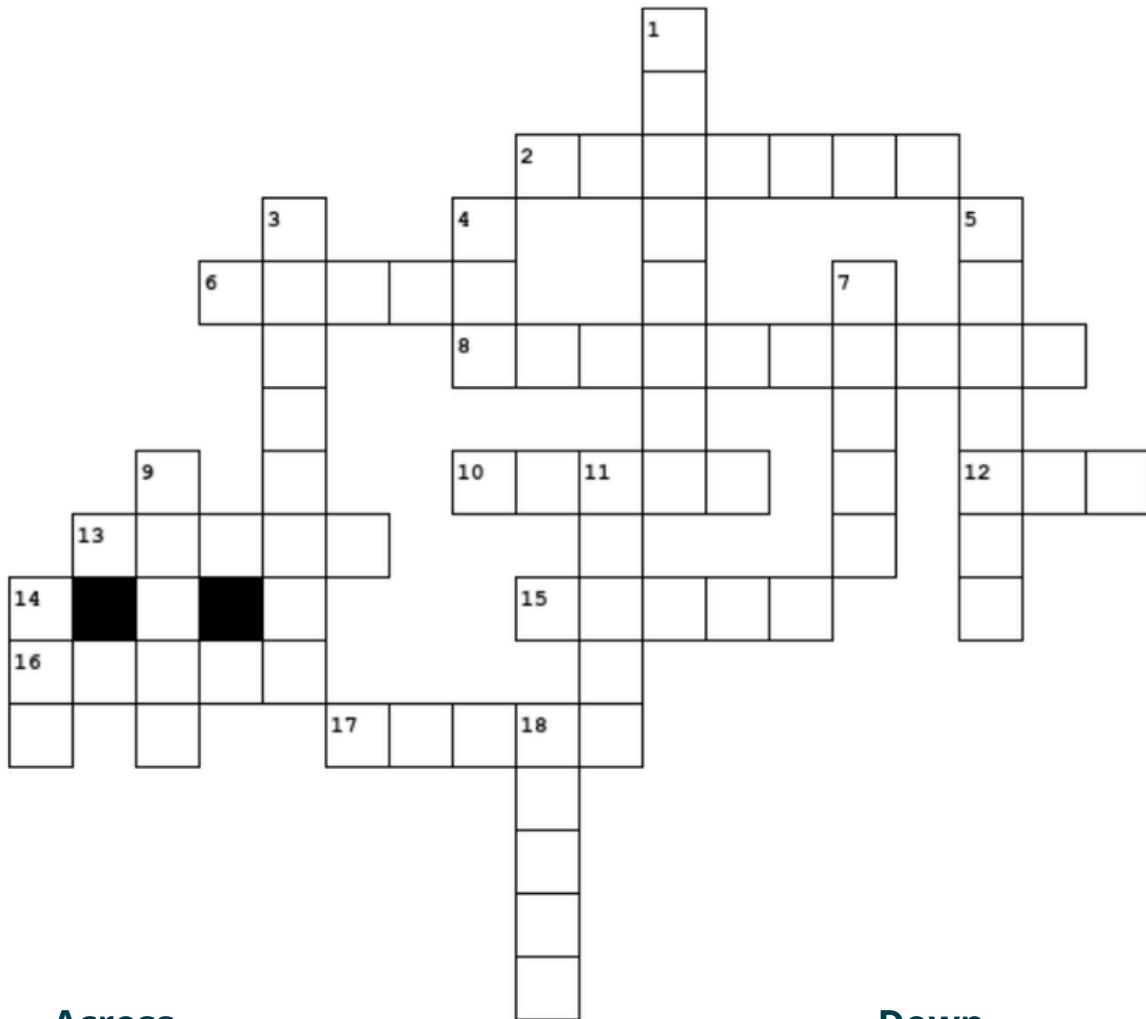
Scales - The small, hard pieces that cover a snake's body.

Denning - When snakes gather in underground homes for winter.

Stewardship - Taking care of the land and animals, often practiced by Indigenous peoples.

Humpback Whale

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Across

2. Warm ocean zones
6. Giant Tail fin
8. Earth's air layer
10. Protect nature
12. Frozen water
13. Blue planet
15. Whale food
16. Plastic waste harms this place
17. Ocean pollution type

Down

1. Breathing hole on whale
3. Tiny sea life
4. Ocean/home
5. Climate issue
7. Large ocean mammal
9. Whale songs travel through this
11. Save the ___
14. Group of Whales
18. Clean energy source

Discussion questions

Write down your thoughts and reflections to the questions below.

- Why do humpback whales migrate such long distances each year?
- How are humpback whales similar to bears preparing for hibernation?
- Why do you think humpback whales can survive in oceans all around the world?
- What challenges do humpback whales face during their migrations?
- Why is it important for scientists to study different whale populations?
- How might climate change affect whale migration routes or feeding areas?
- Why is successful whaling considered an honor within Indigenous coastal communities?
- What can we learn from Indigenous relationships with whales and the ocean?
- Why are humpback whales protected under laws like the Marine Mammal Protection Act?
- What dangers or challenges do humpback whales face today?

Keep learning with us!

We wanted to express our sincere gratitude to all those who helped breathe life into this work.

To explore our resource list and additional learning materials, we invite you to visit sierraclub.bc.ca/humpbackwhale-resource.

