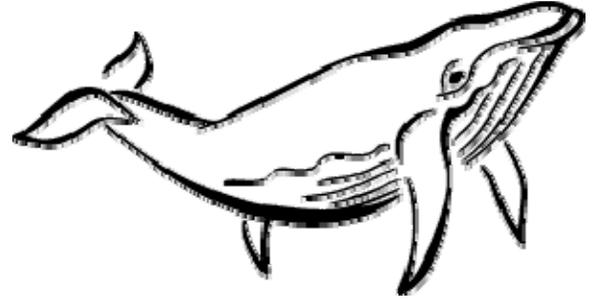


## Blue Whales



Was there ever any animal on earth bigger than the largest dinosaur? The answer is yes and that animal is still around today! The blue whale grows up to 80 to 105 feet in length and weighs up to 200 tons. Blue whales aren't just the biggest creatures on earth, they are also the noisiest. These mammoth creatures make noises, called vocalizations, which sound like loud human moans and groans. Like dolphins, blue whales also emit high sounds that humans can't hear. Scientists record the sounds of whales and dolphins on sonar equipment. Researchers believe that when ocean conditions are calm blue whale sounds can be heard by other whales as far as 1,000 miles away.

Blue whales are actually blue-gray in color. However they look blue when they are seen swimming through the water. Blue whales live to be 80 to 90 years old. It takes about a year before a baby blue whale is born; newborn blue whales weigh three tons and are 25 feet long. Since blue whales are mammals, a baby whale feeds on its mother's milk and gains a whopping 200 pounds a day for the first year of its life. Baby whales are called calves.

There are two types of whales: toothed whales and baleen whales. Blue whales are baleen whales, which means they do not have teeth for chewing like other mammals. Baleen whales have a rough surface material called baleen instead of teeth. Baleen whales eat krill, tiny sea creatures that don't need to be chewed. Baleen whales take in a huge gulp of water, taking the water into an expanded skin sack. Using its tongue, the whale then expels the water and as the water passes over the baleen, the baleen catches to krill and plankton which the whale swallows for food. An adult blue whale needs about 4 tons of food per day, especially when it is preparing to migrate.

Blue whales spend the summer in the arctic region when the krill are plentiful. The whales then migrate to warm waters for the winter. Blue whales are found in all the oceans in the world. Whales, including blue whales, were hunted almost to extinction. They are now protected by law.