**Blue whale** (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

**Distribution**: Worldwide (see map below and full list of countries in the detailed species account online at: https://www.handbook.iwc.int/en/species/blue-whale)

- Broad, flattened head – ‘U’-shaped when seen from above
- Pronounced raised splash guard in front of blow hole
- Light grey, mottled skin, that can appear blue underwater and relatively small often stubby dorsal fin positioned far along the back: ⅓ or ⅔ of the way toward the tail from the head. It can vary in shape.
- Relatively massive, slender and have smooth trailing edges
- Flukes are massive, slender and have smooth trailing edges
- Very thick tail stock
- Long, slender flippers – up to 1/7th of body length. The pointed tips may have light edges.
- Underside may be covered with yellowish diatoms/algae – especially in polar regions
- Pale blue or grey underside
- Light grey, mottled skin, that can appear blue underwater and
- Head uniformly (light) grey/blue - not mottled like body
- 60-88 dark-coloured throat grooves
- Dorsal fin positioned far along the back: ⅓ or ⅔ of the way toward the tail from the head. It can vary in shape.

**Fun Facts**

- Blue whales are the largest animal to have ever lived on the planet (bigger than dinosaurs!).
- A blue whale calf can gain 90 kg per day from drinking the mother’s rich milk.
- An adult blue whale’s heart is the size of a small car, and a child could crawl through its arteries.
- Blue whales are the only whale in the genus *Balaenoptera* that lifts its tail flukes regularly when diving.

**Distribution**

**True Blue Whale**
- Adult length: 23-30m
- Adult weight: up to 180,000kg
- Newborn: 6-7m /2000 – 3000kg

**Pygmy Blue Whale**
- Adult length: maximum 25m
- Adult weight: up to 180,000kg
- Newborn: 4.5-6m /900-1000kg

**Threats**: Habitat loss, ship strikes, climate change

**Habitat**: Continental shelf, offshore

**Diet**: Krill, small schooling fish

**IUCN Conservation status:**
- Blue Whale: Endangered
- Antarctic Blue Whale: Critically Endangered
- Pygmy Blue Whale: Data deficient

**Blue whales** are in every ocean basin feed predominantly on small shrimp-like crustaceans called krill: Photo credit: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antarctic_krill_(Euphausia_superba).jpg

A blue whale’s blow can be 10-12 m high, making it visible from a long distance. This is a pygmy blue whale off the coast of Australia: Photo courtesy of Chris Johnson

There are currently five recognised sub-species of blue whale that occur in different parts of the world: *B. m. musculus*, Northern blue whale, *B. m. intermedia*, Antarctic blue whale, *B. m. indica*, Northern Indian Ocean blue whale – these three are considered “True” blue whales. There are also *B. m. brevicauda*, Pygmy blue whale, and *B. m. un-named subsp.*, Chilean blue whale.