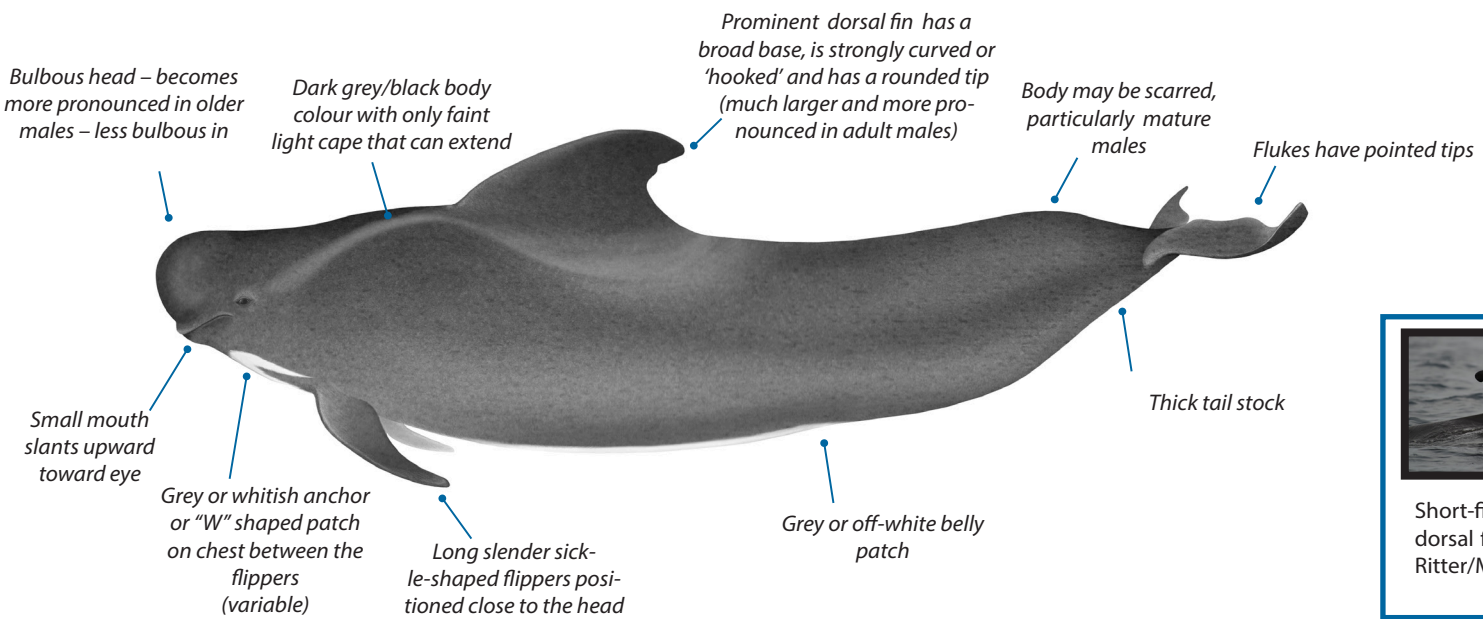


# Pilot whale (*Globicephala* sp.)

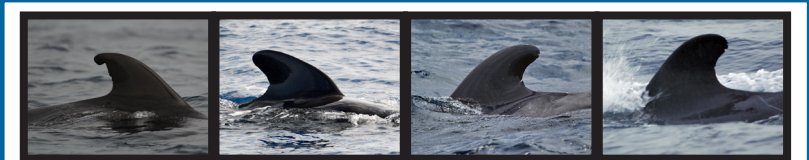
Distribution: tropical, temperate, and sub-polar regions of the N and S hemispheres (see map below and full list of countries in the detailed species account online at: <https://www.handbook.iwc.int/en/species/pilot-whale>. Short-finned and long-finned pilot whales look the same at sea.

**Short-finned pilot whale**  
 Adult length: Up to 7m (male)  
 Adult weight: up to 3,600kg (m)  
 Newborn: 1.4-1.9m / Unknown



**Threats:** hunting, bycatch, contaminants  
**Habitat:** continental shelf, offshore  
**Diet:** fish, squid

IUCN Conservation status: Least Concern  
 Short finned pilot whale: **Data Deficient**  
 Long finned Pilot whale: **Data Deficient**



Short-finned pilot whales can be recognized by the nicks and scars on their dorsal fins, such as these from the Canary Islands. Photo courtesy of Fabian Ritter/MEEReV.

## Fun Facts


- The common name 'pilot whale' is drawn from an old theory that schools were steered or piloted by a designated leader.
- Pilot whales eat mostly squid, which they capture through suction. As a result – they have very few teeth!
- Pilot whales live in stable family groups where both male and female calves remain with their maternal group for life.

### Long-finned pilot whale differences:

Longer flippers – up to 1/5 of body length with more pronounced bend or 'elbow'

Shorter/less pronounced dorsal fin

Southern Hemisphere long-finned pilot whales often have distinctive white saddle patches behind their dorsal fins


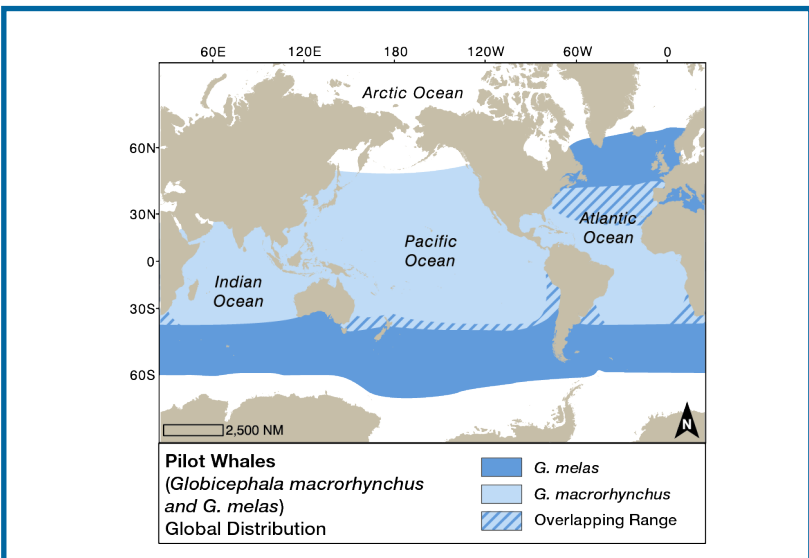


Southern Hemisphere long-finned pilot whales. Note the small gray calf. Photo courtesy of Paula Olson/IWC

Long-finned pilot whales in the Mediterranean Sea showing the typically rounded and 'hooked' dorsal fin. Photo courtesy Chris Johnson



Long-finned pilot whales in the Southern Indian Ocean. Photo courtesy of Paula Olson/IWC

Pilot whale distribution. Adapted by Nina Lisowski from Würsig, B., Thewissen, J.G.M. and Kovacs, K.M. Editors (2018) "Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals", 3rd ed. Academic Press, Elsevier: San Diego. CA. Copyright Elsevier: <http://www.elsevier.com>