



As a result of centuries of hunting the *Eubalaena glacialis* is the most endangered of the whale species. During the 17th century, there were estimated 1200-1700 right whales in the North Atlantic. Whaling from 1600 to 1900 reduced the population to 50 to 175 whales due to commercial whaling. The majority of the current whale population has been spotted in 5 areas near the coast of the United States and Canada. Over the last forty years studies have shown that right whales are found off Cape Cod and in Massachusetts Bay from March through May, and in the Great South Channel from April through June. From July through October some whales are found in the Bay of Fundy and Nova Scotian waters. From November to May a few whales can be found traveling to the coast of Florida and Georgia, where calves are born.

Right Whales have distinctive characteristics. Their flukes, backs, blow hole and head make them easy to tell them from other species of whales. Right whales flukes have smooth trailing edges and are dark underneath. Right whales don't have dorsal fins, separating them from humpback, finback, and minke whales. These latter species are in the family Balaenopteridae while the right whales are in the family Balaenidae. Right Whales are immense and extremely slow swimmers. They average right whale is about fifty feet long. The head of a right whale is one-fourth of its entire body. The lower jaw of a right whale is highly curved allowing the long baleen plates to be enclosed while they are swimming. The rostrum is covered with "hard patches" of skin. Scientists refer to the grayish-white patches on the whales' heads as callosities. Callosities are used to identify whales because each whale has a different pattern. The white coloration of the callosities is caused by an abundance of a small organism known as a "cyamid", commonly known as whale lice. The grey-coloration is keratin, produced by the whale.

Despite their physical structure they are very acrobatic and can be seen breaching, lobtailing, and flipper-slapping. In some cases they will 'hand-stand' for up to two minutes. Right whales feed upon copepods, which are very small zooplankton. The preferred food is Calanus finmarchicus which is relatively (four millimeters) large species of copepod. These species of copepods, unlike phytoplankton, migrate downward during the day and surface during late afternoons and evenings. As the whale passes through the water the opening in the front of the mouth allows water to flow into the mouth of the whale. The copepods are caught in the fine hairs of baleen. Once enough food has been collected the excess water is pushed out and the copepods are consumed.

Over the last forty years studies have shown that right whales are found off Cape Cod and in Massachusetts Bay from January through May, and in the Great South Channel from April through June. During July and October they are found in the Bay of Fundy and Nova Scotian waters. From November to May the whales can be found traveling to the coast of Florida and Georgia.

Home	Background	Members	Abstract	Results	Photos	Links
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------	-----------------------