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Q & A

Humpback Whale Project – Brazil



Learn more about the
Humpback Whale Project



Project
development



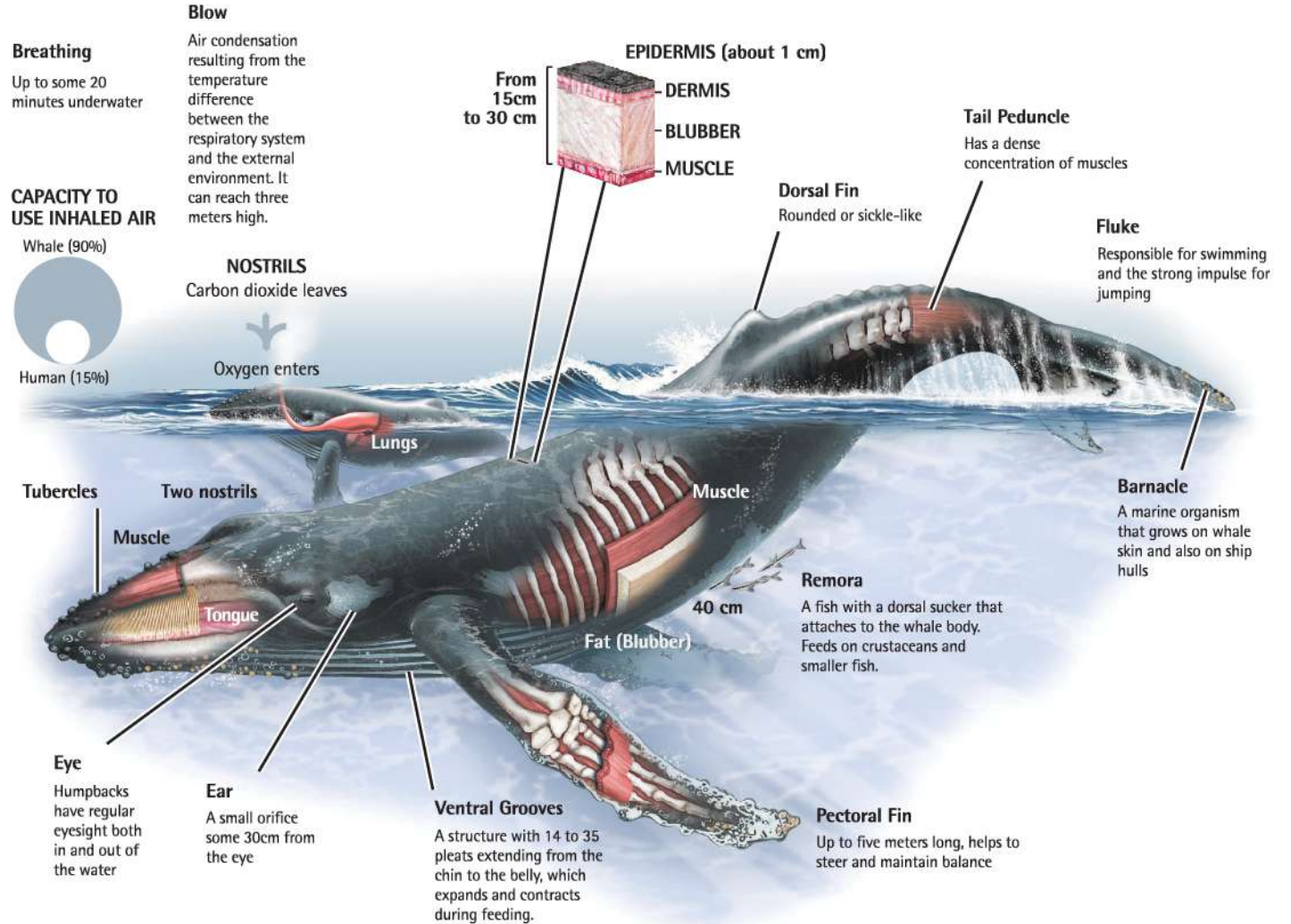
Sponsorship





What is a Humpback Whale?

Humpback whales are cetaceans, a group of mammals which encompasses whales, dolphins and porpoises and which live exclusively in aquatic environments. Humpbacks are one among many species of great whales called mysticetes or "baleen whales", in reference to the bristle curtains – baleen – which hang from the sides of their upper jaw and help in their feeding.



Where do humpback whales live?

Humpbacks are cosmopolitan, which means that they can be found in almost all the oceans. Most of those that are found in Brazilian waters live mainly in the Western South Atlantic, spending summer feeding in the Antarctic region and winter and spring breeding along the Northern and Southeastern Brazilian coasts, especially at the Abrolhos Bank, located in Southern Bahia and Northern Espírito Santo States.



POPULATION
Some 25,000 individuals comprise the population that visits Brazilian waters every year between June and November.



How do we recognize a humpback whale?

Humpbacks are easy to tell apart from other whales given its long pectoral flippers, which can reach up to a third of the body's length. The underside of the tail is generally a combination of black and white, creating unique patterns for each animal just like a fingerprint, allowing researchers to identify each whale for the duration of its life. An adult humpback whale can reach 16 meters long and weigh up to 40 tons.

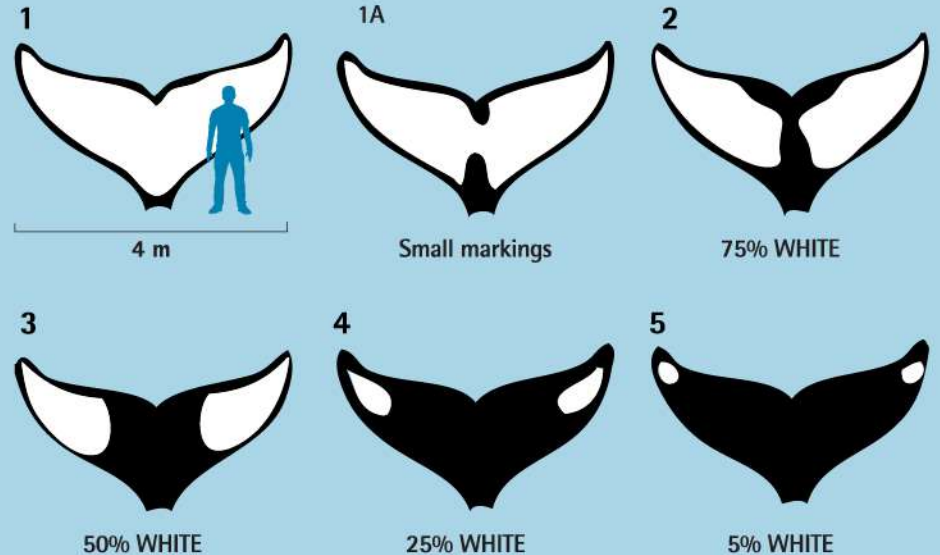
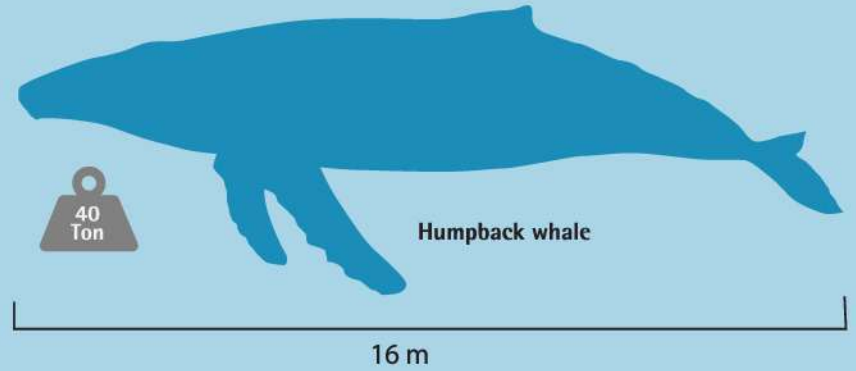


PHOTO-IDENTIFICATION

The black and white markings and the format of the tail are typical of each individual whale. Patterns under the tail are grouped in five pigmentation patterns. In Brazil, patterns 1 and 2 as in the image to the right are predominant.

How do humpback whales feed?

As mentioned before, humpback whales have baleen curtains in their mouths which are used to hold their food. They open their enormous mouths, and advance on the schools of krill, a tiny shrimp-like crustacean, which exists in polar seas, or of small fish like sardines, gulping them with a large volume of water. Then they use their tongue to expel the water, and the food gets trapped inside the baleen curtains, ready to be swallowed. Oftentimes humpbacks can be seen cooperating with each other in their feeding grounds, corralling the schools of prey with bubble curtains blown underwater, then rising to the surface to catch it.

Humpbacks work cooperatively to catch krill and small fish.

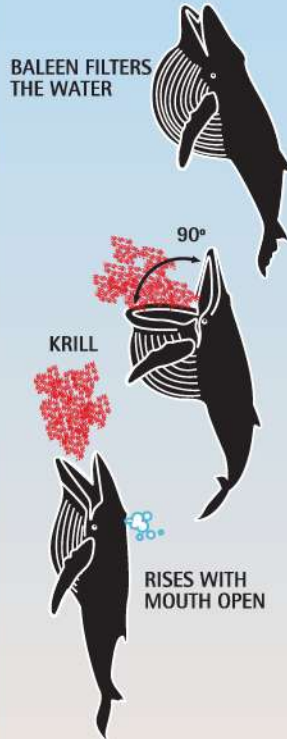
- 1 Bubbles**
Whales make bubble curtains under the krill swarms to create a "wall" and trap them



- 2 Ascending**
With krill trapped by their bubble "net", humpbacks move up towards the surface



- 3 Final attack**
Whales open their mouths and expand their ventral grooves with water and krill

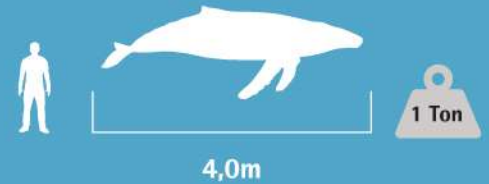


How do humpback whales reproduce?

During breeding season, in winter and spring, humpbacks gather in warmer and shallower waters along the coasts of continents and around some tropical islands. In this period, males sing long songs underwater, which can be heard far away, and compete for the females' preference, forming mating groups which are quite rowdy and mobile, until copulation happens. Gestation lasts about 12 months, and the calf will be born in the next breeding season, already some four meters long and weighing about a ton. This enormous baby will grow quickly thanks to the fat-rich milk provided by the mom and will stay with her for another year until weaning during the next winter, after which time he/she will be on its own.

BIRTH

There are few records of a humpback whale birth, so scientists assume it happens at night, similar to other species of cetaceans in which it has been observed.



1

At night

The female starts having contractions and the first portion of the calf appears through the genital slit.



2

Delivery

The umbilical cord breaks and the calf must swim up to the surface to breathe.



3

Breathing

The female supports the calf on her back, helping it up to the surface.



3

Nursing

The female may adopt a vertical position so the calf can breathe while suckling the fat-rich milk.



What's the importance of protecting whales?

There are many answers to this question. First and foremost, all living beings who share this planet with us, comprising the Earth's biodiversity, have a right to exist, regardless of being "useful" to people or not. With that said, whales are extremely useful to humankind! They are essential components of marine ecosystems, helping in nutrient cycling and fertilization of the upper layers of the ocean, which contributes to enhance oxygen production and carbon absorption, contributing decisively to reduce climate change. Further, healthy and abundant whale populations help foster Whale Watching – read more about it below!



Why do whales strand?

Whales and dolphins can strand due to natural causes, such as diseases and disorientation or to flee from predators. Young calves who get separated from their mothers cannot feed on their own, and end up weak and confused, and ultimately stranding. Ocean and weather conditions such as strong currents and winds can help push debilitated animals towards the shore, as well as carcasses of those who died in the open sea. There are also human-induced strandings caused by ship strikes or entanglement in fishing gear. Ocean pollution and excessive underwater noise can also cause strandings.

If you find a stranded whale in Bahia State get in touch with us through WhatsApp **(73) 98802-1874** (south and central coast) or **(71) 99657-2056** (northern coast of Bahia).





Which are the main threats to whales?

There was a time when the main threat to whales was their direct killing through whaling, which has led the humpbacks and other species of whales to the brink of extinction. Fortunately, this activity is now banned in Brazil and across most of the world, but there are new threats for the whales – and they are just now recovering from the whaling slaughter. Entanglement in fishing nets and gear, and collisions with ships traveling at high speeds, also kill whales and dolphins in great numbers every year. Acoustic pollution in the ocean, caused by a variety of human activities, can interfere in whale communication, hence in their migration and breeding. On top of that, climate change can reduce their feeding sources, with serious consequences for the future of whales and other marine creatures.



What does the Humpback Whale Project do?

The Brazilian Humpback Whale Project was established in 1988 with a mission to study and protect the surviving population of humpback whales that breed in Brazilian waters, and which was threatened with extinction at that time. Thanks to our 35 years of efforts, humpbacks are nowadays almost fully recovered in Brazil. The Project, managed by Instituto Baleia Jubarte, the Brazilian Humpback Whale Institute, and sponsored by Petrobras, continues to monitor Brazilian humpbacks to ensure that the species will continue to thrive. The Project also contributes to the development of Whale Watching as an economic option for the coastal communities where it works and maintains Environmental Education programs in schools and for the general public. At the Humpback Whale Spaces in Praia do Forte and Caravelas (Bahia State), Vitória (Espírito Santo State) and Ilhabela (São Paulo State), our interpretive centers, one can learn more about the whales, our work and marine conservation.

Where does the Humpback Whale Project work?

The Brazilian Humpback Whale Project works directly along the entire coast of the State of Bahia, with offices in Praia do Forte and Caravelas; in Espírito Santo, from its base in Vitória; and in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, through partnerships with local institutions which also work to protect whales, dolphins and the marine environment. The Project also works at the international level, being a member of the Forum for the Conservation of the Patagonian Sea and taking part in meetings and deliberations of relevant international treaties, such as the International Whaling Commission and the Migratory Species Convention.





Which are the results of this work?

The main result of more than three decades of efforts by the Project is its decisive contribution to save the species from extinction in Brazil. In 2014, the year when humpback whales left the Brazilian Red List of Endangered Species, the Ministry of the Environment officially recognized this contribution by the Project. And our work to promote Whale Watching is helping to create and maintain thousands of jobs in coastal communities. The Project also contributes significantly to Science, with dozens of scientific articles published, M.Sc. and Ph.D. theses completed, and technical and scientific events organized, making the results of research undertaken by the Project and its partners at universities and other institutions widely available to the public.

What is Whale Watching?

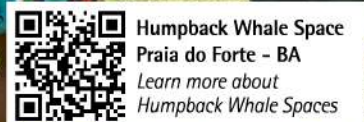
Whale watching is the activity of actively seeking these majestic animals in their environment to observe them and watch their behavior. Humpback whales can be seen regularly during winter and spring off Bahia and Espírito Santo States, and also with growing frequency in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. This kind of Tourism generates jobs and income in the coastal communities where it is practiced, and if the federal norms are duly followed, has no impact on the species' conservation. The use of tour boats to gather scientific data also contributes enormously to widen our knowledge about the humpbacks and to improve the whale watching activity itself. Nowadays, living whales are worth much more money than dead ones!



How can we help the Humpback Whale Project to protect whales?

Visit the Humpback Whale Spaces in Praia do Forte, Itacaré, Caravelas (Bahia), Vitória (Espírito Santo) and Ilhabela (São Paulo) to learn more about our work and the world of whales and consider supporting us at our donations centers. Taking part on Whale Watching trips contributes to add more value to the whales, ensuring that more people in the coastal communities care about their protection – and you can help us directly in our research work by sending any photos of humpback tails to fotoid@baleiajubarte.org.br. Report any whale or dolphin strandings.

Everything we do in our daily lives generates an impact on the global environment, in the oceans and, of course, on whales. So to help protect them we must begin at home, adopting a more sustainable and conscious lifestyle. It's our choice!



Humpback Whale Space
Praia do Forte - BA
Learn more about
Humpback Whale Spaces

What is the BIOMAR Network?

The Marine Biodiversity Conservation Network (Rede de Conservação da Biodiversidade Marinha), or Biomar Network, brings together Projects sponsored by PETROBRAS, through the Petrobras Socioenvironmental Program (Programa Petrobras Socioambiental), Albatroz, Baleia Jubarte, Coral Vivo, Golfinho Rotador and Meros do Brasil. The Biomar Network Projects develop conservation, research, environmental education, social inclusion and communication actions focused on flagship species to ensure that the knowledge and protection of the invaluable natural heritage represented by the Brazilian Sea are part of the construction of citizenship in our country.



