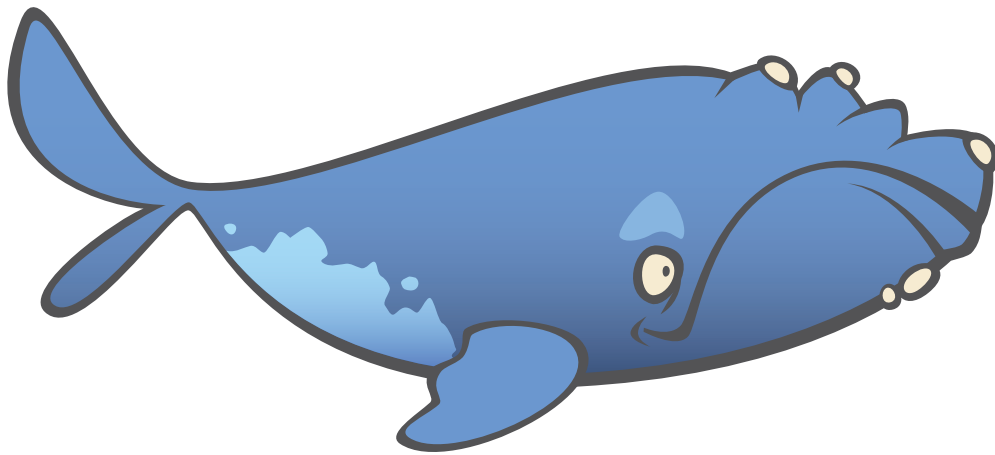


The Facts About North Atlantic Right Whales



Ocean
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Where have all the right whales gone?

Hunters killed almost all the North Atlantic right whales by the early 20th century. It has been against the law to hunt them and all other large whales for more than 70 years, but North Atlantic right whales are still one of the world's most endangered marine mammals. Only about 400 are alive today. They make their home in the Atlantic Ocean along the East Coast of the U.S. and Canada -- where lots of fishermen and ships travel, too.

Did You Know?

Right whales are baleen whales. That means they don't have teeth; instead, they use baleen, which looks sort of like a comb, to filter their food, microscopic shrimp-like copepods, out of the water.



Image taken by and copyright to the Whale Center of New England under NMFS right whale permit number 605-1607.

What's for dinner?

North Atlantic right whales, the rarest of all large whales, feed in the colder waters of the Gulf of Maine and Canada from spring to fall. These huge animals eat tiny shrimp-like creatures called copepods that are about the size of a grain of rice. Right whales skim along through a patch of their favorite food with their mouths open, and their baleen catches the copepods and filters them out of the water.

Did You Know?

A single right whale can consume more than 2,500 pounds of food a day. That's a lot of copepods!



Image taken by and copyright to Wildlife Trust under NMFS right whale permit number 932-1489.

These whales have big bodies - and big heads

Right whales have enormous heads which can measure up to one-third of their total body length. They have weird growths on their heads, which scientists use to tell them apart, called “callosities” (you say it like this: kah-la-us’-eh-tees). These are hardened patches of skin covered by hundreds of cyamids, also known as whale “lice,” which causes the patches to look white.

Did You Know?

Scientists believe that right whales can live to be 60 years old or older.



Photo: NOAA

How to recognize a right whale

Right whales are the only whales to have callosities on their heads. You can also tell a right whale from other kinds of whales because it doesn't have a top fin on its back, called a dorsal fin. And when a right whale breathes out from its two blowholes, the whale's breath, combined with water droplets, makes a v-shape.

Did You Know?

Right whales can grow up to 50 feet, which is 10 feet longer than a school bus, and they can weigh more than 60 tons.



Photo: NOAA

Whales on the move

North Atlantic right whales live in the Atlantic Ocean, and are found from Canada all the way south to Florida. They have their calves in the warm waters off Florida and Georgia during the winter. Then they return to the colder waters of the north in the spring, where they stay until the fall, feeding and storing up fat.

Did You Know?

North Atlantic right whales used to be found throughout the North Atlantic, but now their only known calving grounds are in the warm waters of the southeastern U.S. Right whales have just one calf and are very protective of their young. Calves will stay with their moms a year or more before going off on their own.

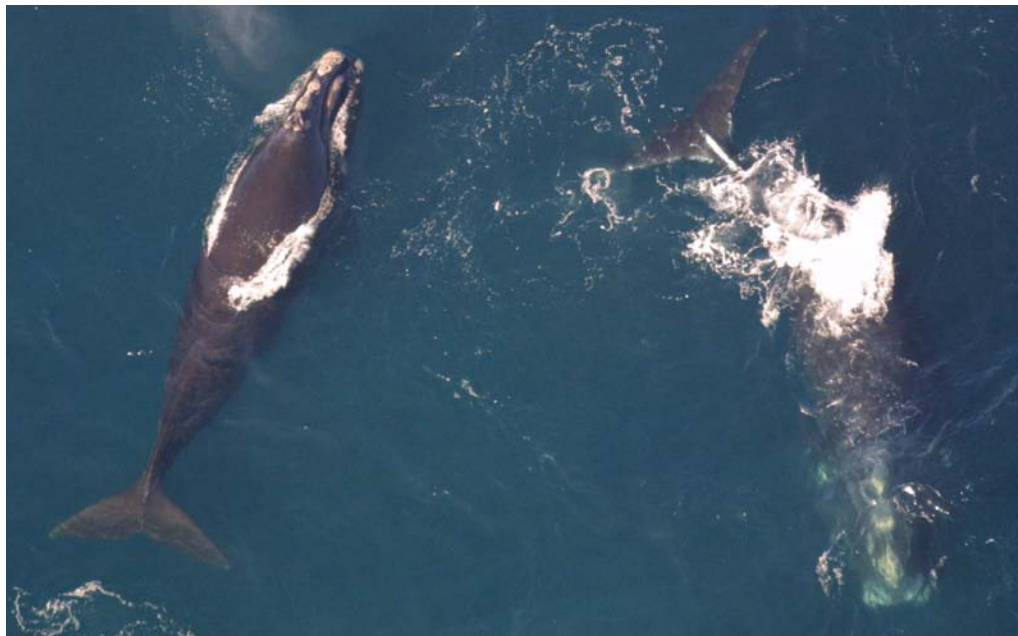


Photo: NOAA

Problems for the Right Whales

1. Threats from fishing gear:

North Atlantic right whales can die from getting entangled in fishing gear. They are mammals that need to breathe air; they can drown if ropes keep them from swimming up to the surface. Nearly three out of four of all living North Atlantic right whales have scars in their skin from being caught on fishing gear. Big nets along with the ropes on crab pots and lobster traps can entangle whales' tails, heads, and flippers. Since 2004, at least 16 right whales have been entangled, more than 3 per year.

Solution: Lobster traps are usually connected with floating ropes that can entangle whales as they dive down in the ocean. Scientists have found that if fishermen use a kind of rope that sinks, whales are a lot less likely to swim into them and get hurt or killed. Ocean Conservancy is working to tell fishermen about how they can save whales by using sinking ropes.

2. Threats from ships:

North Atlantic right whales live where humans are going about their daily life, too. Many "highways" for ships are located in the same areas where these whales swim. Sadly, vessels of all sizes hit the whales, and more right whales die from getting struck by ships than from

Problems for the Right Whales continued

anything else. These “ship strikes” can break bones, cut the skin, and cause internal bleeding.

Solution: Ocean Conservancy is working to help get laws passed that will give ships speed limits when they are sharing the ocean with whales. Scientific research shows that if ships slow down enough, there will be a lot fewer accidents where ships run into whales, and whales will be less likely to die if they are struck.

3. Threats from trash:

Trash in the ocean kills thousands of seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles each year. Sometimes they get tangled up in trash and drown. Sometimes they eat trash that chokes them. And sometimes they eat trash that poisons them, causing them to get sick or die.

Solution: Ocean Conservancy’s International Coastal Cleanup is an amazing event – every year in September, hundreds of thousands of volunteers around the world pick up tons of trash from coastlines, rivers, and lakes. They write down what they find so that we can all understand the problem of trash in the ocean better. And the Cleanup teaches people about how important it is to keep trash out of the ocean in the first place! Find out more about this exciting event and join in at www.h20C.org.