Fig. 172 Surface - blow - dive profile

Can be confused with: Bryde's whales can be easily confused with sei whales (p. 54). The presence of 3 head ridges confirms a whale's identity as a Bryde's whale (however, be aware that rippling water on the head of other species can be mistaken for accessory head ridges). Fin (p. 52) and minke (p. 58) whales can also cause some confusion; size (fin whales are largerand minke whales smaller), head shape, and coloration differences are the best characteristics to use.

Size: Adults can be up to 15.5 m long: newborns are about 4 m. Maximum weight is about 20 to 25 t. A smaller form has been described from some areas.

Geographical Distribution: Bryde's whales are creatures of the tropical and subtropical zones and generally do not move poleward of 40º in either hemisphere. They are found both offshore and near the coast in many areas. Whales of this species are not known to make extensive north to south migrations, though short migrations have been documented. Resident populations may be common in certain areas, such as the Gulf of California.

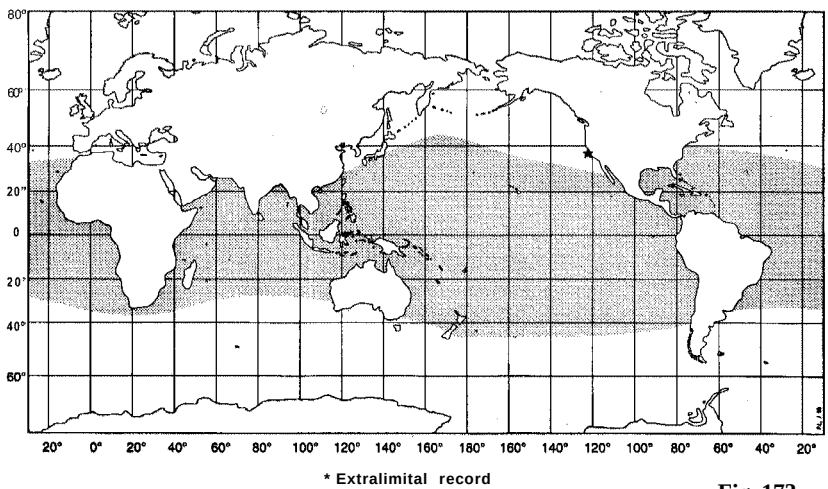


Fig. 173

Biology and Behaviour: Although generally seen alone or in pairs, Bryde's whales do aggregate into groups of 10 to 20 on feeding grounds.

Unlike other rorquals, the tropical Bryde's whale does not have a well-defined breeding season in most areas, and births can occur throughout the year.

Bryde's whales are primarily fish eaters, but they also take invertebrates. They are very active lunge feeders, often changing direction abruptly when going after mobile fish prey.

Exploitation: The history of whaling for Bryde's and sei whales is nearly impossible to separate, because these species were not consistently distinguished until recently. The Bryde's whale is one of the few great whales not listed as endangered.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

Balaenoptera acutorostrata Lacepède, 1804 **BALAEN Bal 1** **MIW**

FAO Names: En - Minke whale; **Fr** - Petit rorqual; **Sp -** Rorcual enano.

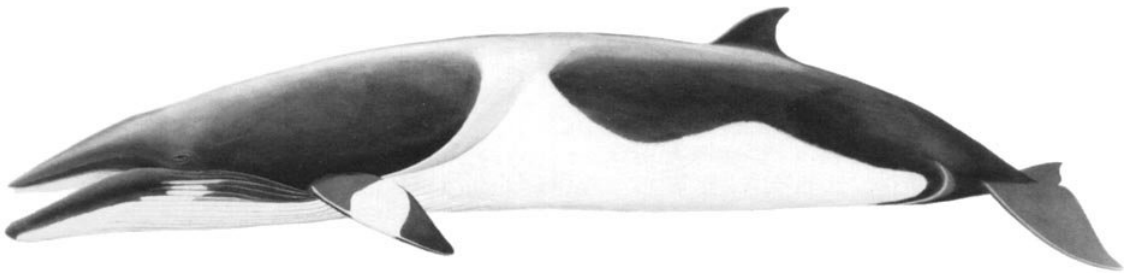
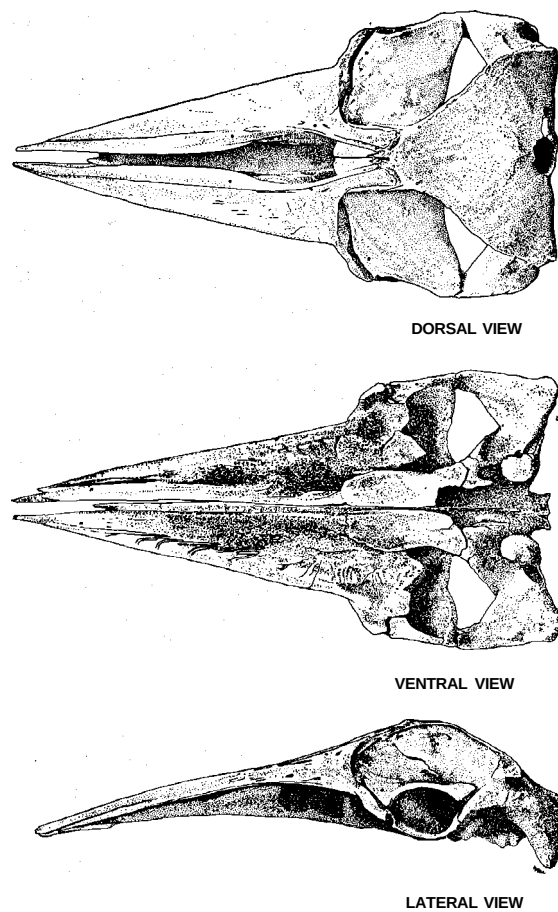


Fig. 174 *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Distinctive Characteristics: Minke whales are generally easy to distinguish from the larger rorquals. The head is extremely pointed, viewed both from the side and from above, and the median head ridge is prominent. The dorsal fin is tall, recurved, and located about two-thirds of the way back from the snout tip. There are 30 to 70 moderately short ventral pleats (often extending just past the flippers) and 231 to 360 pairs of white to greyish baleen plates.

The minke's coloration is distinctive: dark grey dorsally and white beneath, with streaks or lobes of intermediate shades on the sides or both. Some of the streaks may extend onto the back behind the head. The most distinctive light marking is a brilliant white band across each flipper of Northern Hemisphere and some Southern Hemisphere minke whales (the band is not usually present on Antarctic animals). This band is generally visible through the water when animals are near the surface. The blow tends to be diffuse and is often not visible at all.



Rg. 175 Skull

Fig. 176 Surface - blow - dive profile

Can be confused with: When seen clearly, minkes are probably the easiest to distinguish of the whales of the genus ***Balaenoptera,*** by their small size, usual absence of a visible blow, unique head shape, and distinctive colour patterns (especially the flipper bands). Sei (p. 54) and Bryde's whales (p. 56), and some beaked whales, may present identification problems, but generally only if the animals are seen at a distance.

Size: Adult minke whales reach just over 9 m in length (rarely some females may reach a maximum of 10.7 m). Maximum body weight is about 14 t. Length at birth is 2.4 to 2.8 m.

Geographical Distribution: Minke whales are widely distributed from the tropics to the ice edges in both hemispheres. Although they can be seen offshore as well, minkes are more often seen in coastal and inshore areas. Minke whales are very rare in some tropical pelagic areas, such as the eastern tropical Pacific.

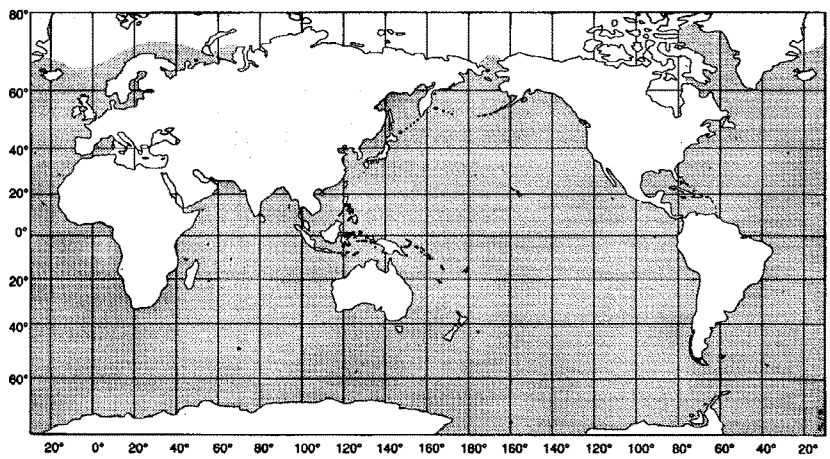


Fig. 177

Biology and Behaviour: Minke whales sometimes aggregate for feeding in coastal and inshore areas of cold temperate to polar seas. Although groups elsewhere are generally much smaller (singles, pairs, and trios), aggregations in the Antarctic may contain hundreds of animals. Minkes do not fluke-up on a dive, but they do sometimes breach and perform other aerial behaviours.

Calving occurs in low latitude areas (although the migrations of minkes are not as well-defined as those of larger rorquals) in winter months.

The prey types of minke whales are primarily krill and small schooling fishes.

Exploitation: For, the last 2 decades, the minke whale has been the main target of the Antarctic whaling fleets. Although the IWC commercial whaling moratorium has afforded all great whales protection, a certain amount of "scientific whaling" continues and Norway recently resumed commercial whaling for this species. Japan also took some during recent Antarctic whaling seasons. The minke whale is the most abundant of all baleen whales.

IUCN Status: Insufficently known.

Megaptera novaeangliae (Borowski, 1781)

BALAEN Meg 1 **HUW**

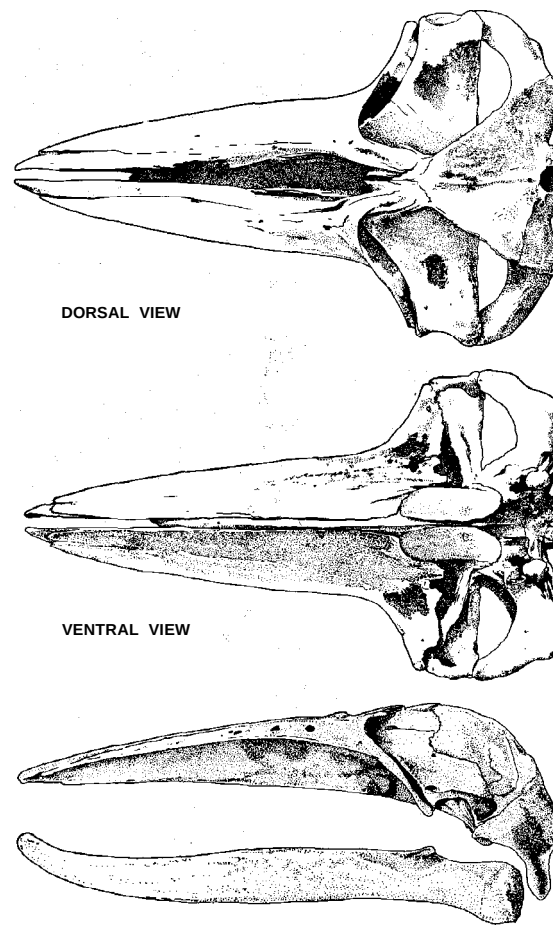
FAO Names: En - Humpback whale**: Fr -** Baleine à bosse**; Sp -** Rorcual jorobado.

Fig. 178 ***Megaptera novaeangliae***

Distinctive Characteristics: The humpback whale differs substantially from the general rorqual body plan. The body is more robust; the flippers are extremely long (up to one-third of the body length) with a series of bumps, including 2 more prominent ones in consistent positions on the leading edge, more-or-less dividing the margin into thirds. The flukes have a concave, serrated trailing edge, and the dorsal fin is low and broad-based (usually sitting on a hump). The head has a single median ridge, and the anterior portion of the head is covered with many bumps (each containing a single sensory hair).

The body is black or dark grey dorsally and may be white ventrally, but the borderline between dark and light is highly variable and seems to differ by population (the white extends up onto the sides and back in some Southern Hemisphere humpbacks). The flippers are white on the ventral side and vary from all-white to mostly black on the dorsal surface. The ventral side of the flukes also varies from all-black to all-white.

There are 270 to 400 black to olive baleen plates, and 14 to 35 ventral pleats extending back to the navel or beyond. The blow is rather low and bushy for a balaenopterid, reaching only 3 m. It may sometimes appear V-shaped.



Fig, 179 Skull

Fig. 180 Surface - blow - dive profile

Can be confused with: At close range, the humpback is one of the easiest whales to identify. At a distance, however, there can be some confusion with other large whales, especially blue (p. 50) and sperm (p. 68) whales. When a closer look is obtained, humpbacks are generally unmistakable.

Size: Adult humpback whales are 11 to 16 m long and newborns are 4.5 to 5 m in length. Weights of at least 35 t are attained by adults.

Geographical Distribution: Humpbacks feed and breed in coastal waters, often near human population centres, and this helps make them one of the most familiar of the large whales. They migrate from tropics (breeding areas) to polar or sub-polar regions, reaching the ice edges in both hemispheres (feeding areas); their migrations take them through oceanic zones.

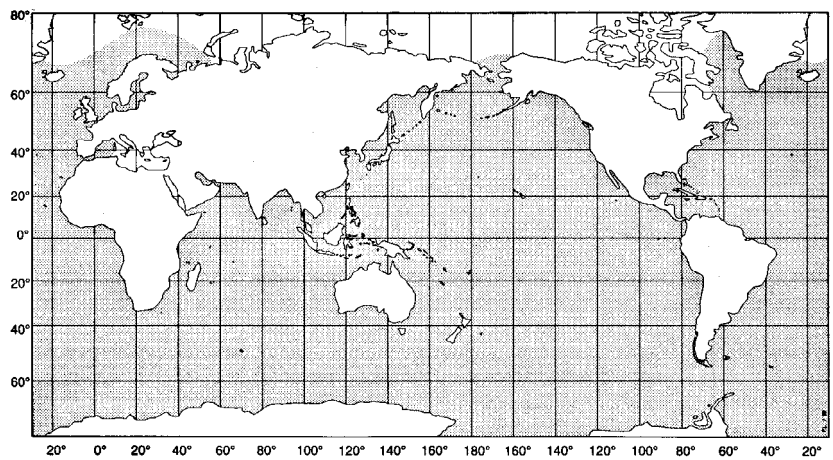


Fig. 181

Biology and Behaviour: Although they generally occur singly or in groups of 2 or 3, larger aggregations develop in feeding and breeding areas. Humpbacks are probably the most acrobatic of all great whales, sometimes performing full breaches that bring their entire bulk out of the water. They are adaptable lunge feeders, which use bubble nets, bubble clouds, tail flicks, and other techniques to help concentrate krill and small schooling fish for easier feeding. Sometimes humpbacks gather into coordinated groups of up to 20 or more whales, which work together to herd and capture prey. On the breeding grounds, males appear to compete for access to estrus females, apparently using their now well-known complex songs as part of their breeding display. Calves are born on wintering grounds in tropical and subtropical regions. Individual humpback whales can be identified using photographs of the distinctive markings on the undersides of their flukes. Such photos can be of great help in defining movements and migrations of this and other species.

Exploitation: Humpback whales were not a favorite target of Yankee whalers. However, because of their relatively slow swimming speeds and coastal habits, they were an early target of modern large-scale commercial whaling, beginning with shore based whaling in many areas. Since international protection in 1944, most stocks now appear to be stable or on the rise.

IUCN Status: Vulnerable.

Eschrichtius robustus (Lilljeborg, 1861) **ESCH Esch 1** **GRW**

FAO Names: En - Gray whale**; Fr -** Baleine grise**; Sp -** Ballena gris.

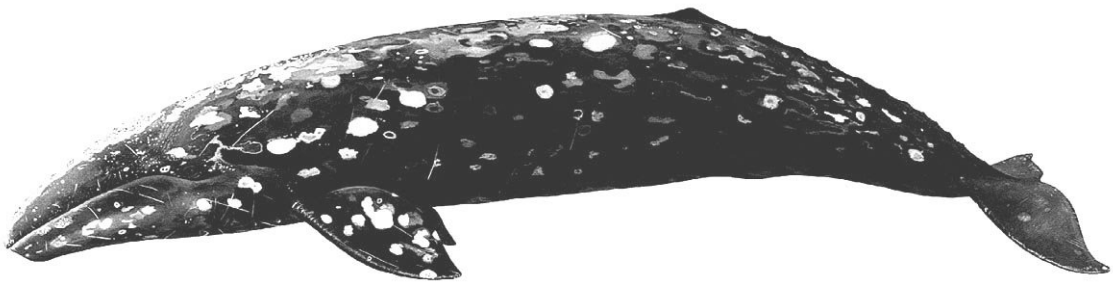


Fig. 182 ***Eschrichtius robustus***

Distinctive Characteristics: Gray whales are easy to identify. They are intermediate in robustness between right whales and rorquals. The upper jaw is moderately arched, and the head is acutely triangular in top view and slopes sharply downward in side view. The flippers are broad and paddle-shaped, with pointed tips. The flukes have smooth S-shaped trailing edges, with a deep median notch. There is a dorsal hump about two-thirds of the way back from the snout tip, followed by a series of 6 to 12 smaller "knuckles" on the dorsal ridge of the tail stock. There may be several (generally 2 to 5) short, but deep, creases on the throat that allow compression of the throat during feeding.

Although young calves are dark charcoal Qrey, all other gray whales are brownish Qrey to light grey. They are nearly covered with light blotches and white to orangish patches of whale lice and barnacles, especially on the head and tail. These patches of ectoparasites are very helpful in distinguishing this species.

The mouth contains 130 to 180 pairs of yellowish baleen plates, with very coarse bristles. The blow is bushy, heart-shaped when viewed from ahead or behind, and rises less than 3 to 4 m.

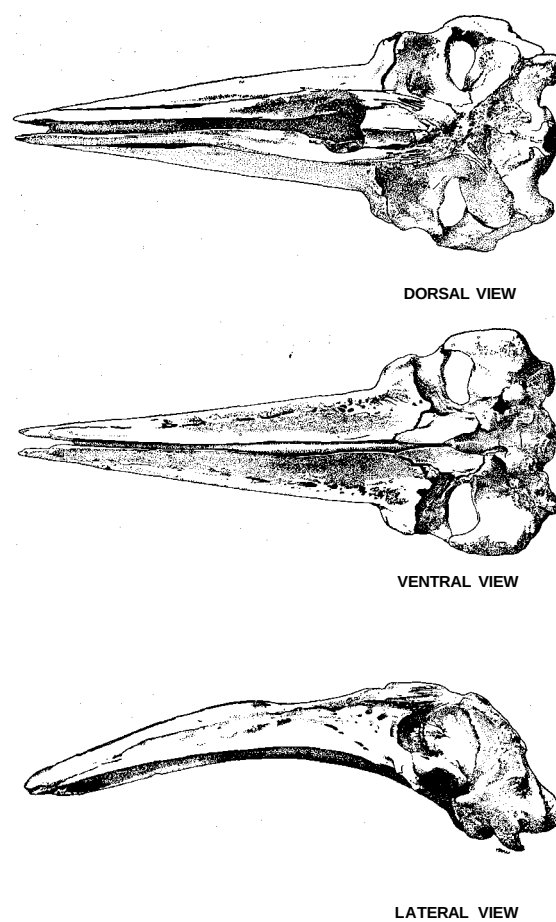


Fig. 183 Skull

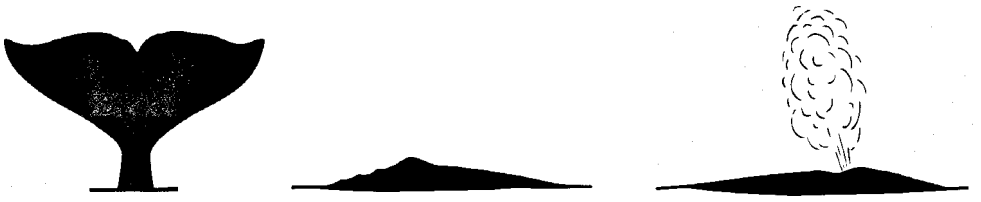


Fig. 184 Surface - blow - dive profile

Can be confused with: Gray whales are unique in body shape and patterning, and there is usually little problem with identification. From a distance, however, they can sometimes be confused with right (p. 42), bowhead (p. 46) sperm (p. 68) or humpback (p. 60) whales.

Size: At birth, gray whales are about 4.5 to 5 m long; adults are 11 to 15 m in length. Maximum body weight is over 35 t.

Geographical Distribution: Gray whales are found only in the North Pacific Ocean and adjacent seas. Gray whales are bottom feeders and are thus restricted to shallow continental shelf waters for feeding. In fact, they are the most coastal of all great whales, living much of their lives within a few tens of kilometres of shore (although they do feed great distances from shore on the shallow flats of the Bering and Chukchi seas). Gray whale stocks which previously occurred in the North Atlantic were wiped out by whalers in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

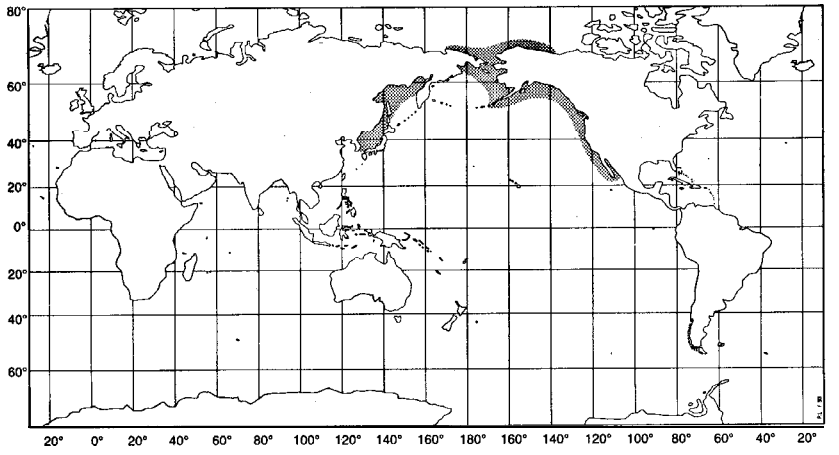


Fig. 185

Biology and Behaviour: Most groups are small, often with no more than 3 individuals, but gray whales do sometimes migrate in pods of up to 16, and larger aggregations are common on the feeding and breeding grounds. Breaching, spy-hopping, and other aerial behaviours are common, especially during migration, and in and near the breeding lagoons of Baja California and mainland Mexico. The migration from winter breeding grounds in Mexico to summer feeding grounds in the Bering, Chukchi, and occasionally Beaufort, seas is witnessed by tens of thousands of people each year along the west coast of North America.Breeding occurs in winter, during migration, and in or near the Baja California breeding lagoons. Gray whales feed primarily on swarming mysids and tube-dwelling amphipods in the northern parts of their range, but are also known to take red crabs, baitfish, and other food opportunistically.

Exploitation: The North Atlantic stock was apparently wiped-out by whalers in the 18th century. A western North Pacific (Korean) stock may also have been extirpated in the mid 20th century; its continued existence as a small remnant is still debated. The eastern North Pacific (California-Chukotka) stock nearly suffered the same fate twice, once in the late 1800s and again in the early 1900s. Both times, a respite in commercial whaling allowed the population to recover. About 170 to 200 from this latter stock are killed annually under special permit by commercial whalers on behalf of Soviet aborigines, and one or a few are taken in some years by Alaskan Eskimos. Since receiving IWC protection in 1946 and the end of research harvests in the late 1960s this population has increased, and now apparently equals or exceeds pre-exploitation numbers.

IUCN Status: Not listed.

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