

MARINE MAMMALS OF LONG ISLAND IDENTIFICATION GUIDE



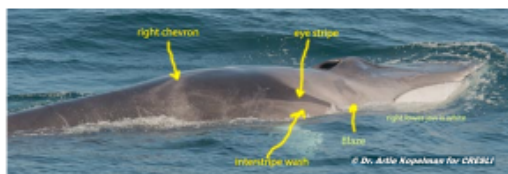
In contrast to the toothed whales, baleen whales (the *Mysticetes*) lack teeth and have overlapping plates of **baleen**, a hardened tissue made of keratin, used to strain smaller prey (fish, krill, and other small crustaceans) from the water. Baleen whales are further distinguished by a double blow-hole opening and are generally much larger than the *Odontocetes*.

Baleen Whales



Finback/Fin Whale
Balaenoptera physalus
< 85 feet
~ 170,000 pounds
ENDANGERED

Fin whales are characterized by a prominent, curved dorsal fin found ~2/3 of the way back from the head. Fin whales possess a lightly-colored area on the right side of their heads called a blaze, posterior to which is a dark eye stripe and inter-stripe wash (lightly colored area). Behind these is a distinctive V-shaped pattern of coloration around their head called the chevron. They are the second largest of all the whales and can travel at speeds of 25 knots.



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Humpback Whale

Megaptera novaeangliae
< 60 feet
~ 100,000 pounds

Humpback whales are easily distinguished by long pectoral flippers which occupy 1/4 – 1/3 of their body length and by a namesake hump anterior to their dorsal fin. Pronounced bumps called tubercles line the flippers, providing lift and maneuverability to these acrobatic and often-surface active whales.



Surface activities of humpbacks include breaching, lunge feeding, flipper and/or tail slapping, and peduncle throwing. Humpbacks sometimes use bubbles to corral and trap fish and small crustaceans, the only known cetacean to do so.

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Pinnipeds (Seals)

All seals found on Long Island are *Phocid* (true) seals. True seals lack external ear flaps and have fur and claws on their front flippers, differentiating them from the “eared” seals. Although all pinnipeds are marine mammals, they regularly leave the water to rest and/or give birth on land or ice. Known as “hauling out”, this is extremely important for the health of the seal.

Five species of seal occur on Long Island: harbor, gray, harp, hooded, and ringed (rarely). They migrate southward from New England and Canada, arriving in November and remaining through mid-May, although some occur year round. **All species are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and must not be harassed or harmed in any way.**



Harbor seals can be viewed in small groups hauled out on sand bars, rocks, or remote beaches, or when popping their heads up in the waters nearby. While resting, they often lie with their heads and hind flippers elevated in a “banana” position.

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Atlantic Harbor Seal

Phoca vitulina vitulina
< 5.5 feet
~ 350 pounds

Harbor seals are the most abundant seal on Long Island. Harbor seals are characterized by short, “dog-like” snouts and speckled, fur that varies in color from light tan, silver, or blue-grey. Harbor seals feed on fish, crustaceans and mollusks.

IT IS ILLEGAL AND HARMFUL TO HARASS SEALS. PINNIPEDS ARE FEDERALLY PROTECTED AND YOU MUST NOT TOUCH OR APPROACH A SEAL WITHIN 150 FT.

Harp Seal

Pagophilus groenlandicus
< 6 feet
~ 400 pounds

Harp seals are named for a dark harp shape on the backs of mature seals. Juveniles, which occur on Long Island more frequently than adults, have distinct blotches, differentiating them from the mottled and “freckled” pelage (fur) of harbor seals. Harp seals spend their summers in the high arctic.



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Pinnipeds (Seals), continued

Atlantic Gray Seal

Halichoerus grypus atlantica
< 10 feet
~ 900 pounds

Gray seals are characterized by their large size and long, horse-like snout. Their color patterns are similar to, but bolder than, harbor seals. Females are lighter in color and smaller than males.



Gray seals are deep-diving pinnipeds with an extremely varied diet which differs by age, sex, season, and region.

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Hooded Seal

Cystophora cristata
< 9 feet
~ 900 pounds

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Like the harp seal, hooded seals inhabit the arctic and occasionally migrate to the waters of Long Island. Typically, it is juveniles more often than adults that are spotted in our waters. The hooded seal is large and is distinguished by an inflatable sac in the male's nostril that is used in courtship. Adults of both sexes have irregular black patches of fur over a silvery background, but juveniles are counter-shaded, consisting of a dark pattern on top (dorsal) and a light cream or tan color below (ventral).

From our colleagues at NOAA Fisheries New England/Mid-Atlantic: If you see seals on the beach, use the **Rule of Thumb** while watching seals to make sure you are giving them enough space:

- 1) Close one eye.
- 2) Make a thumbs up and hold your thumb so it is in line with your vision and the seal.
- 3) If you can see the seal from behind your thumb, you are too close, so back up!



The waters of Long Island are home to various marine mammals, including several **pinniped** and **cetacean** species. Pinnipeds are a group of semi-aquatic mammals including the '*earred seals*' (sea lions and fur seals), '*true seals*', and the walrus, but only the true seals (*Phocids*) occur in the wild on and near Long Island. Cetaceans are a group of fully aquatic marine mammals that includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises. Whales are divided into the *Odontocetes* (toothed whales) and *Mysticetes* (baleen whales). Taxonomically-speaking, dolphins and porpoises are **toothed whales** (*Odontocetes*), a group that also includes larger species such as beluga and sperm whales. As the name implies, these whales have teeth and feature a single blowhole opening. *Odontocetes* use echolocation, a type of biological sonar, to hunt, detect predators, and navigate.

Toothed Whales



Marianne E. McNamara, CRESLI

Short-beaked Common Dolphin

Delphinus delphis

< 8.5 feet

~ 170 pounds

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Short-beaked Common Dolphins are one of the most abundant dolphins in the western North Atlantic. Common dolphins have an hourglass pattern with a dark, V-shaped cape from the head to below the dorsal fin, and a yellow/tan anterior section. Common dolphins occur in social groups (pods) which often swim alongside ships and bow ride. Common dolphins have a rounded forehead (melon) and long rostrum (snout). They feed on fish and squid.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Tursiops erebennus < 9.5 feet,

600 lbs. and/or *Tursiops*

truncatus 13 feet, 1,400 lbs.

check here if seen



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Bottlenose dolphins are one of the most recognizable and well-known of all cetaceans. Their name derives from a relatively short and thick rostrum (snout). Light to dark grey in color, they feed on a variety of fish, squid, and crustaceans. There are two species of bottlenose dolphins encountered off Long Island: *Tamandend's Bottlenose* and the *Common Bottlenose*. *Tamandend's*, which is smaller and lighter than the *Common*, occurs in relatively shallow, near-shore waters, while the larger and darker *Common* Bottlenose is found in deeper water, farther from shore.



Baleen Whales, continued

Minke Whale

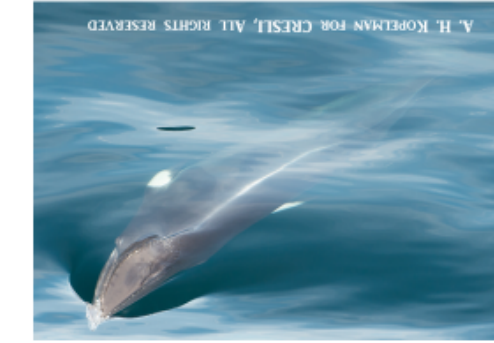
Balaenoptera acutorostrata

< 30 feet

~ 20,000 pounds



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Minke whales are the smallest baleen whales found off Long Island. They are distinguished by their small size, pointed snout and distinctive white bands on the ends of their flippers. Minke whales tend to be solitary and can be difficult to spot because of their small size and lack of visible 'blow' (spout) when surfacing. Breaching and other surface activities by minke whales are rare.



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North Atlantic Right Whale

Eubalaena glacialis

> 55 feet

<140,000 pounds

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

check here if seen



The North Atlantic Right Whale is extremely rare; fewer than 350 individuals remain. Victims of commercial whaling, these were the 'right' whales to hunt. Right whales move slowly at the surface skimming copepods from the water making them vulnerable to ship strikes and entanglement with fishing gear, keeping them at an extremely high risk of extinction.



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These robust whales lack a dorsal fin and are characterized by their large, arching mouths and a head that is lined with white patches of thickened skin called callosities. Like human fingerprints, callosity patterns are unique and help researchers identify individuals, like #2681, who is pictured above.



Spouting Spouts

Have you ever wondered how naturalists can identify whales from a distance? The blow or "spout" (exhalation) of a whale varies in height, shape, and visibility by species. Fin whales produce a towering blow which can reach heights of 20 feet. In contrast, humpbacks produce a shorter, "bushier" blow similar in shape to a balloon. Minke whales produce an inconspicuous blow only 6 feet high. The blow of Right Whales is unique and distinctive; tall and "V"-shaped, it can reach 15 feet in height. Wind, humidity, light conditions, and animal activity can also influence spout characteristics and our ability to observe them.



"IF YOU SEE A BLOW, GO SLOW!"

Observe whales at a distance of >100 yards

In addition to identifying species of whales, scientists can often distinguish individual whales (of the same species) from one another. The underside of humpback tail flukes (below) bear unique shapes and patterns that can be used to recognize individuals. Differences in dorsal fin shape, chevron and blaze patterns, and scars can be used to identify individual fin whales. Dorsal fins and scarring can also be used to identify humpback whales when tails are not in view. The callosities of North Atlantic Right Whales differ by individual allowing researchers to recognize each of the remaining ~350, a very important tool in monitoring this extremely at-risk species.



How You Can Help

Scan code below to access and/or purchase CRESLI whale and seal photos:



CRESLI's mission is to promote and foster understanding and stewardship of coastal ecosystems through research and education. CRESLI relies on volunteers, memberships, donations and purchases to support its initiatives.

For more information about marine mammals, ongoing research efforts, and how you can get involved, visit

www.cresli.org.

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