

# Whale, dolphin & porpoise identification guide



wild whales  
B.C. cetacean sightings network

This project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Department of the Environment



## HARBOUR PORPOISE

*Phocoena phocoena*

**LENGTH** Less than 2 m/ 6 ft.  
**DORSAL FIN** Dark, triangular  
**APPEARANCE** Dark grey back with lighter underside  
**BEHAVIOUR** Inconspicuous, travels slowly;  
generally alone or in groups of 2–3



## DALL'S PORPOISE

*Phocoenoides dalli*

**LENGTH** Up to 2.2m/ 5–7ft.  
**DORSAL FIN** Triangular with white trailing edge  
**APPEARANCE** Black, with large white flanks; small hump  
on back before tail flukes  
**BEHAVIOUR** Usually in groups of 2–10;  
creates "rooster-tail" of spray when swimming quickly



## PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN

*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*

**LENGTH** Up to 2.5 m/ 8 ft.  
**DORSAL FIN** Sharply curved, bi-coloured  
**APPEARANCE** Dark back, white underside, grey side streaks  
**BEHAVIOUR** Only small, local cetacean that leaps  
completely clear of water; usually in groups of 50 or more



## KILLER WHALE

*Orcinus orca*

**LENGTH** 6–9 m/ 18–28 ft.  
**DORSAL FIN** Black, triangular in females and calves;  
tall, distinctive in adult males  
**APPEARANCE** Black body with white underside; grey  
saddle patch behind dorsal fin; white eye patch  
**BEHAVIOUR** Usually in groups of 3–25; bushy blows  
visible in cold weather



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## MINKE WHALE

*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

**LENGTH** 7–10m/ 23–33ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Curved, far back on body

**APPEARANCE** Dark grey to black colouration; white band on topside of pectoral fins; pointed head with prominent noseridge

**BEHAVIOUR** Usually solitary; blows rarely visible; surfaces 1–2 times between dives; elusive



## GREY WHALE

*Eschrichtius robustus*

**LENGTH** 12–14 m/ 39–46 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** No dorsal fin; knuckle-like bumps on lower back

**APPEARANCE** Mottled grey colour; patches of barnacles

**BEHAVIOUR** Low, bushy, heart- or v-shaped blow; occasionally lifts tail flukes when diving; often feeds close to shore



## HUMPBACK WHALE

*Megaptera novaeangliae*

**LENGTH** 11–15 m/ 37–50 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Small, nubby fin with broad base

**APPEARANCE** Black body; bumps or knobs on head; long pectoral fins with white underside

**BEHAVIOUR** Medium-sized, bushy blow; usually surfaces 2–5 times between deep dives; often raises tail flukes on final dive



## FIN WHALE

*Balaenoptera physalis*

**LENGTH** 18–22 m/ 59–72 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Sickle-shaped; relatively large; very far back on body

**APPEARANCE** Right lower lip is white, while left is dark;

**BEHAVIOUR** Blowhole and dorsal fin not visible simultaneously; tall, narrow blow; rarely lifts tail flukes when diving



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## SPERM WHALE

*Physeter macrocephalus*

**LENGTH** 11–18 m/ 36–59 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Triangular/rounded hump, followed by knuckles

**APPEARANCE** Wrinkled dark skin; huge square-shaped head; blowhole very close to front of head

**BEHAVIOUR** Low, bushy blow, angled to the left; lifts broad triangular tail flukes high in air before diving



## SEI WHALE

*Balaenoptera borealis*

**LENGTH** 12–14 m/ 39–46 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Slender and erect; less than 2/3 from front of body

**APPEARANCE** Blue grey, dark grey or black back; blowhole and dorsal fin visible simultaneously when surfacing

**BEHAVIOUR** Narrow, cloud-like blow; rarely exposes tail flukes



## BLUE WHALE

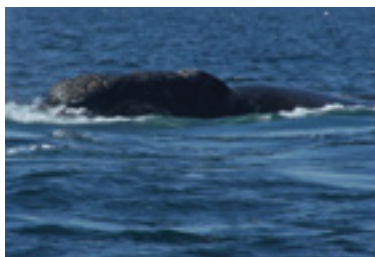
*Balaenoptera musculus*

**LENGTH** 20–25 m/ 65–83 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Variable shape; very small relative to body

**APPEARANCE** Blue-grey, mottled colouring; dorsal fin not seen until well after blow ends

**BEHAVIOUR** Blows 9 m/ 30ft tall; often exposes tail flukes when diving



## NORTH PACIFIC RIGHT WHALE

*Eubalaena japonica*

**LENGTH** 11–15 m/ 37–50 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** None

**APPEARANCE** Dark, rotund body; large head covered in white, irregular growths (callosities); no dorsal fin

**BEHAVIOUR** Wide, V-shaped blow; may raise tail flukes when diving

Note: North Pacific Right Whales have not been seen in BC waters in 40yrs. If you see one, please call 1866 I SAW ONE



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# Sea turtles of B.C. identification guide

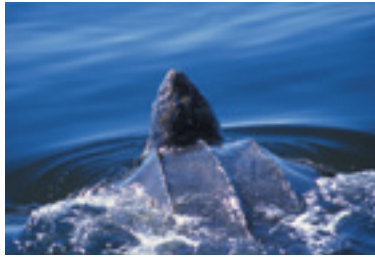


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Loggerhead and Olive Ridley turtles have not yet been recorded in B.C. waters but have been seen in Washington and Alaska.



## LEATHERBACK TURTLE

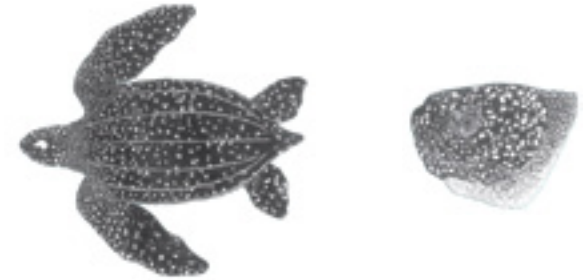
*Dermochelys coriacea*

(The most commonly seen sea turtle in B.C. waters)

**TOTAL LENGTH** Up to 3m/ 9 ft.

**COLOUR** Black, with white spots

**FEATURES** Very large; ridges along back (looks like the bottom of a boat); shell tapers to a point at rear end



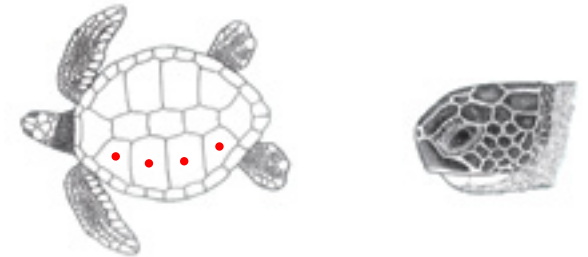
## GREEN TURTLE

*Chelonia mydas*

**TOTAL LENGTH** Up to 1.5 m/ 5 ft.

**COLOUR** Dark greyish green with light blotches on shell

**FEATURES** Shell tapered at rear; small head relative to body; four costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



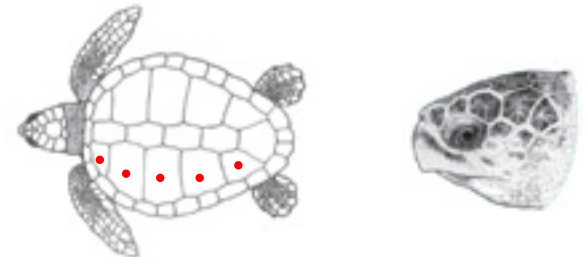
## LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

*Caretta caretta*

**TOTAL LENGTH** 0.3-1.0 m/ 1-3 ft. (juvenile only)

**COLOUR** Reddish brown

**FEATURES** Large head and jaws; five costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



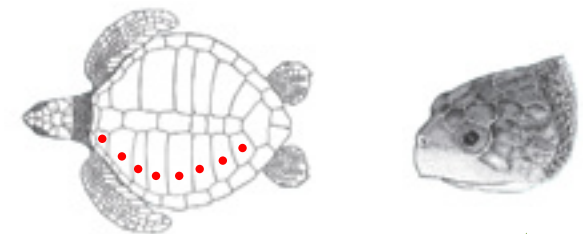
## OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE

*Lepidochelys olivacea*

**TOTAL LENGTH** Up to 1m/ 3 ft.

**COLOUR** Olive/ grey

**FEATURES** Shell width equal to or greater than shell length (highly domed shell); six to nine costal (side) plates (see ● on diagram)



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## NORTHERN RIGHT WHALE DOLPHIN

*Lissodelphis borealis*

**LENGTH** Up to 3 m / 9 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** None, only dolphin species in the north Pacific without

**APPEARANCE** Slender bodies; mostly black with white on the belly and the tip of the beak; very small pectoral flippers

**BEHAVIOUR** Extremely social, usually in large groups of 200 +; often leap clear of the water; may associate with other dolphin species



## RISSO'S DOLPHIN

*Grampus griseus*

**LENGTH** Up to 4 m / 12 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Tall, curved; usually darker grey than body

**APPEARANCE** Grey; body often appears covered in scratches; head is very rounded without a noticeable rostrum (beak)

**BEHAVIOUR** Social, usually in groups of 10 - 50; may porpoise, breach, spyhop



## COMMON DOLPHIN

*Delphinus delphis*

**LENGTH** Up to 2.5 m / 8 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Small, highly pointed and black

**APPEARANCE** Criss-cross pattern of yellow, white, grey and black bands (note: animal in photo is covered in diatoms, giving a more brownish colouration); prominent, pointy black rostrum (beak)

**BEHAVIOUR** Very acrobatic; social, often in groups of 20 - 100 +; in BC small groups (2 - 3) or lone animals have been observed



## FALSE KILLER WHALE

*Pseudorca crassidens*

**LENGTH** Up to 6 m / 18 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Curved, black

**APPEARANCE** All black body; small, rounded head; long, slightly bent pectoral flippers

**BEHAVIOUR** Extremely social, usually in large groups of 20 - 100; in BC lone animals have been observed; may breach, bowride, or porpoise



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Beaked whales are found offshore in deep waters. There are many species of beaked whale in the northern Pacific Ocean and this sheet includes the most frequently encountered. Beaked whales avoid vessels and are usually found far from shore; few sighting reports of beaked whales exist in British Columbia.

**BEAKED WHALE IDENTIFICATION:** Single blowhole. Most individuals (especially males) are heavily scarred. Beaked whales have prominent rostrums (beaks) and teeth that emerge from their lower jaw (primarily males).

**BEAKED WHALE BEHAVIOUR:** Beaked whales spend very little time at the surface and are deep divers. Groups may range from ~5-20 and individuals are often seen swimming in very close proximity to one another.

## BAIRD'S BEAKED WHALE

*Berardius bairdii*

**LENGTH** Up to 13 m / 40 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Small, triangular and very far back

**APPEARANCE** Dark brown with irregular white patches on the belly; long beak and bulging forehead



## CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALE

*Ziphius cavirostris*

**LENGTH** Up to 7 m / 21 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** More curved (falcate) like that of a dolphin

**APPEARANCE** Orange brown with a white, stubby head and small white patches



## STEJNEGER'S BEAKED WHALE

*Mesoplodon stejneri*

**LENGTH** Up to 5 m / 15 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Small, triangular and very far back

**APPEARANCE** Dark with light coloration around the lower jaw and eyes; prominent triangular tooth may be seen



## HUBB'S BEAKED WHALE

*Mesoplodon carlhubbsi*

**LENGTH** Up to 5 m / 15 ft.

**DORSAL FIN** Small, triangular and very far back

**APPEARANCE** Dark with light coloration around both jaws and a white mound above the eye; a triangular tooth may be seen



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