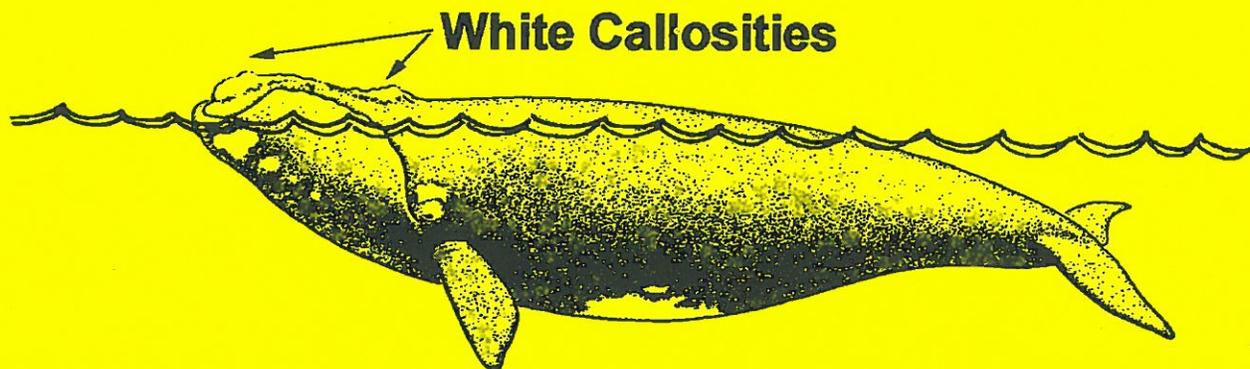


# Have You Seen This Whale?



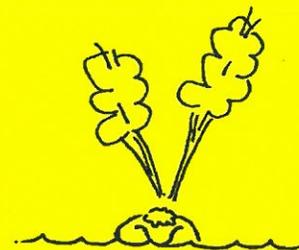
Scientists need your help in spotting the highly endangered North Atlantic Right Whale. The coastal waters of Georgia and northeastern Florida are the only known calving and wintering ground for Right whales. From Jacksonville to Cape Canaveral, these whales will often come close enough to shore to be visible, but sightings are sparse and very valuable.

## From Dec. to April Look For:

NO Dorsal Fin

White spots, called callosities, on top of head (see above picture)

Bottlenose dolphins often swim with Right whales. Look closely if you see these dolphins; whales may be nearby



V-Blow



Black Tail with distinctive V-notch

**Call the Right Whale Hotline Toll Free:**

**1-888-97-WHALE/1-888-979-4253**

Sponsored by: Marineland Right Whale Project and Marine Resources Council



## **NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES: FAQ's**

### **Why are they called "Right" whales?**

Early whalers referred to them as the right whale to kill because they were slow moving, floated when killed, were often found near shore, and possessed a thick layer of blubber that resulted in a large quantity of oil to sell.

### **Why are right whales endangered?**

Right whales were the first whales to be commercially hunted and were hunted to near extinction by the mid-1930's. Although they were given international protection in 1935, their numbers have been slow to recover due to deaths caused by human impacts. The current population of North Atlantic right whales is around 500.

### **What are the primary causes of death?**

About 50% of right whale mortality is due to human impact from ship strikes and entanglement in fishing gear.

### **How big are right whales?**

Adult right whales average 45-50 feet in length and weigh 30-60 tons (60,000-120,000 pounds). Calves are about 15 feet at birth and weigh about 1 ton (2,000 pounds), but they double their weight in the first month of life.

### **How long do they live?**

There is documentation of these animals living 60 plus years.

### **How many species of Right whales are there?**

There are 3 species of Right Whales, North Atlantic, North Pacific and Southern. North Atlantic right whales survive in the western Atlantic only. North Pacific right whales are highly endangered with less than 100 animals remaining. The Southern Right whale, which is found primarily around South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Argentina in South America, and Antarctica is believed to have a population of about 10,000 animals.

### **What are the significant physical characteristics of right whales?**

Although only 10% of the Right whale is usually seen above the water, several characteristics are prominent: white raised patches called callosities on the upper head; no dorsal fin on the back; triangular shaped tail that is black on both sides with a deep notch in the middle; a V-shaped blow; and paddle-shaped flippers. About 40% of right whales have white bellies. Callosities are raised roughened patches of skin on the upper head, chin, and over the eyes of right whales. The white color is due to small crustaceans called cyamids or whale lice that live on the rough skin. Cyamids feed on the dead skin and do not harm the whales. The pattern of callosities is unique to each whale, like a fingerprint, and allows scientists to identify individual right whales.

### **What do the Right whales eat and how much?**

They eat copepods, which are tiny crustaceans about the size of a half a grain of rice and rust in color. Adult right whales will consume 1 to 1-1/2 tons of copepods per day during the summer feeding months. Scientists have not observed right whales feeding on the calving grounds probably due to the low concentration of copepods found in our waters.

### **How do they eat?**

Right whales have baleen plates in place of teeth suspended from the top of the upper jaw. These plates, which can reach 8 feet in length, are composed of keratin like our fingernails, and have fine

hairs on the inner edges. A right whale has 220 – 260 plates. As the whale swims through the water, either at the surface or underwater, with its mouth open, the copepods are caught on the fine hairs and swallowed whole. Right whales do not drink sea water. They extract the water they need from their food.

### **How do they breathe?**

Like all baleen whales, right whales breathe through two blowholes on the top of the head. Adults can hold their breath for 15-20 minutes. Newborn calves breathe more frequently and learn to hold their breath as they become older.

### **How deep can they dive?**

Right whales have been reported feeding at 600 feet, based on surfacing with mud on their heads and sonar records.

### **When do they mature?**

Females reach sexual maturity at about age 10 and potentially may bear 5 to 6 calves in a lifetime, usually with 3 to 5 years between each calf. Gestation is about 12 months. Males reach sexual maturity a few years later.

### **How do calves nurse?**

The mother appears to remain stationary while the calf submerges at right angles to her body. The calf appears to remain upright and nurses from one of two mammary glands located on the mother's underside about 1/3 of her body length from her tail. This process has not been closely observed. Calves nurse for about 9 – 12 months.

### **Which Right whales migrate to this area?**

Only about 50-150 of the approximately 500 remaining right whales travel to the calving grounds on the Georgia/Florida coast. Primarily, the whales who migrate here are pregnant females who come to give birth and a number of male and female juveniles. Mothers sometimes return with their yearling calves. Adult males very rarely come to this far south. Scientists do not know precisely where the rest of the population goes.

### **What other type of whales can be seen in our area?**

Besides right whales, we have seen humpback whales as they migrate from the New England area to their winter calving grounds on the Silver Bank of the Dominican Republic. Humpbacks have long, white, wing-like pectoral fins with a small dorsal fin about two-thirds of the way down their back. Their tail flukes have white patterns on the underside. They are fast swimming whales and are frequently seen breaching, or jumping out of the water.

### **When and where are we most likely to see right whales?**

Right whales generally arrive in our area around mid-to late December and return north by mid-March. While in our area, the whales' movements are unpredictable. The best places to look for right whales are elevated locations such as piers, dune walkovers, and high-rises.

### **How close can we get to see right whales?**

Federal regulations require that a distance of 500 yds. (1500 ft.) must be maintained at all times around right whales. This includes swimmers, surfers, kayakers, boats, and aircraft.

### **How do we report a whale sighting?**

Call the toll-free hotline sponsored by Marine Resources Council 1-888-97-WHALE (1-888-979-4253).

## Right Whale Information

21 January 2014

### Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972

\* The MMPA prohibits, with certain exceptions, the "take" of marine mammals in U.S. waters and by U.S. citizens on the high seas ... .

\* The term "take" means to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.

### North Atlantic right whale protection 50 CFR Part 224 (30 November 2004)

\* Restrict approaches within 500 yards of a right whale by vessel, aircraft, or other means in an attempt to reduce ... disturbance and the potential for vessel interaction and injury (\*\* close approach considered harassment \*\*)

### Listed as an endangered species — Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531)

---

\* A primary concern is for approaches by boaters, paddleboarders, and surfers. While the approach may be mostly benign, close approaches have implications for human and whale safety. there is the issue of harassment and the concern for human safety.

\* A mother right whale may become defensive and aggressive if a boater, surfer, or paddleboarder should get between her and her calf. A swipe of her flukes could result in injury and death.

\* Curious calves may approach boaters etc., and their "play" may be boisterous.

\* Breaching right whales have damaged vessels.

\* Right whales have been struck and injured by boat propellers.

\* Assistance with public education is requested.

---

### Contacts:

Marineland Right Whale Project [local]

Jim Hain (904) 923-5050 Joy Hampp (904) 669-8615

NOAA/NMFS Right Whale Coordinator

Barb Zoodsma (904) 321-2806 (o) (904) 415-3960 (c)

Florida Fish & Wildlife Law Enforcement

Hotline to Dispatch 1 (888) 404-3922 JAX Dispatch direct (904) 359-3883

NOAA Law Enforcement

Richard Chesler (386) 492-6686 x303 (321) 403-3640 (c)

Florida Fish & Wildlife Research – St. Augustine

Tom Pitchford (727) 423-8430

## RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

### Endangered Right Whales in Coastal Waters of Northeast Florida

21 January 2014



Primary website for information: [www.aswh.org](http://www.aswh.org)

- \* **Right Whale Team Handbook 2013-14**
- \* **Right Whale Annual Report for 2012-13 Season**
- \* **Right Whale Behavior, published in the on-line journal PLoS ONE**
- \* **Marineland Right Whale Project — Program Description**
- \* **AirCam — Learn about our airplane**

#### Our Project Blog

[marinelandrightwhale.blogspot.com](http://marinelandrightwhale.blogspot.com) – Marineland Project sightings and updates

#### Additional websites:

[www.narwc.org](http://www.narwc.org) – the Right Whale Consortium site, includes *Right Whale News*

[rwcatalog.neaq.org](http://rwcatalog.neaq.org) – excellent information on the catalog and family trees

[www.mrcirl.org](http://www.mrcirl.org) — our partners to the south, maintain the sighting report hotline

[rightwhalesouth.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://rightwhalesouth.nmfs.noaa.gov) — NMFS/NOAA Southeast Regional Office info

#### SIGHTING REPORT HOTLINE (toll-free)

1-888-97-WHALE

(1-888-979-4253)