

Humpback Whales

Humpback whales are enormous and adults can grow to lengths of up to 19 metres. They are famous for their magical songs which can be heard from over 20 miles away. Humpbacks are friendly and curious creatures and are a popular species amongst whale watchers. Sadly, humpback whales are considered to be an endangered species. However, numbers have been growing in recent years and it is thought that there are now 80,000 humpbacks alive today!



Appearance

Humpback whales have a distinctive appearance. They have a large, knobby head, a black body and long fins. In fact, they have the longest fins of all marine mammals. Female humpbacks are larger than males and can weigh up to 36,000kg (six times as heavy as some elephants!)

Life Cycle

Babies grow inside their mothers for just under 12 months and when calves are born, they measure about 6 metres in length. Humpback whales tend to live alone or in small groups (pods). However, mothers and their calves stay together for up to one year. Humpback whales are found in oceans around the world. They tend to feed in colder waters and then migrate to warmer seas in the winter in order to breed and give birth. Their diet consists mostly of krill (small crustaceans) and small fish and they feed by swallowing large mouthfuls of water which contain the fish.

Fun Facts

- The scientific name for humpback whales is 'megaptera noveangliae' which means 'giant wings'.
- Humpbacks live for about 50 years although they have been known to live to almost 100!
- Humpback whales are air-breathing mammals and can hold their breath for up to 45 minutes!

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Behaviour

Humpbacks are famous for their playful behaviour and one of the most awe-inspiring sights is that of a humpback whale leaping out of the water and splashing down with its fins and tail (this is known as breaching). Male humpbacks sing songs that last for up to 20 minutes and are different depending on what ocean they are in. Scientists are not entirely sure why they sing but one thought is that they do it to attract female whales. Humpbacks have been observed interacting with other species and they have even been seen protecting other sea creatures from predators such as sharks and killer whales.



Questions

1. How many humpbacks are thought to be alive today? Tick one.

- 800
- 8000
- 80,000
- 8

2. Fill in the missing word in this sentence.

Humpbacks are friendly and _____ and are a popular species amongst whale watchers.

3. What other heavy animal is the humpback whale compared to?

4. Tick true or false for the following statements.

	True	False
Male humpbacks are lighter than females.		
Baby humpback whales are called colts.		
Humpbacks eat mostly small fish.		
Humpbacks are famous for 'breaching'.		

5. For what length of time can a humpback's song last? Tick one.

- 36 minutes
- 12 minutes
- 20 minutes
- 20 hours

6. Why do you think that the scientific name for humpback whales is 'megaptera noveangliae'?

7. How do we know that humpback whales are friendly and sociable mammals? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. What are humpback whales famous for? Tick one.

- their playful behaviour
- their diet
- their age
- their predators

Answers

1. How many humpbacks are thought to be alive today? Tick one.

- 800
 8000
 80,000
 8

2. Fill in the missing word in this sentence.

Humpbacks are friendly and **curious creatures** and are a popular species amongst whale watchers.

3. What other heavy animal is the humpback whale compared to?

Another heavy animal that the humpback is compared to is an elephant.

4. Tick true or false for the following statements.

	True	False
Male humpbacks are lighter than females.	✓	
Baby humpback whales are called colts.		✓
Humpbacks eat mostly small fish.	✓	
Humpbacks are famous for 'breaching'.	✓	

5. For what length of time can a humpback's song last? Tick one.

- 36 minutes
 12 minutes
 20 minutes
 20 hours

6. Why do you think that the scientific name for humpback whales is 'megaptera noveangliae'?

Accept answers which explain that 'megaptera noveangliae' means 'giant wings' and refers to the humpback's fins e.g. Megaptera noveangliac means 'giant wings' and humpback's have very long fins which look a lot like wings.

7. How do we know that humpback whales are friendly and sociable mammals? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Accept answers which refer to the text, such as: 'Humpbacks have been observed interacting with other species...' This tells me that humpback whales are friendly and like being with other sea creatures.

8. What are humpback whales famous for? Tick one.

- their playful behaviour**
 their diet
 their age
 their predators