



Bowhead Whale

Balaena mysticetus

The bowhead whale is an Arctic species with a circumpolar distribution. Like other right whales, it is black and lacks a dorsal fin. In recent years it has been recorded much further south; European sightings may all represent the same individual.

Quick facts

Order Cetartiodactyla

Conservation status
Global *Least concern*



Global trend *Increasing*

Size 18 - 20 m

Weight up to 54,000 kg

Life span Potentially 200 years.

Habitat

Favours ice edge around Arctic Ocean, migrating northwards in summer into high Arctic as ice retreats.

Behaviour

Seasonal distribution is influenced by prey and ice conditions, migrating to avoid entrapment in the ice. The individual(s) spotted in Cornwall, Northern Ireland, Ireland, and elsewhere in Europe may reflect the break-up and southward drift of ice that the Arctic is experiencing.

Diet & Feeding

Diet includes at least 60 species but mainly small to medium crustaceans, including krill and amphipods.

Reproduction

Average age at first reproduction is around 20 years. Females give birth every 3 - 7 years, and calves are weaned at 9 - 12 months.

Conservation & Threats

Probably around 10,000 mature individuals globally. Commercial whaling prohibited since 1930s. Whaling prior to this depleted populations throughout range. This species is ice-adapted, and while the reduction of Arctic sea-ice may in the short term present increased foraging opportunities, the long term implications are not clear.

Range

