

Guide to Reporting Whale Sightings



In the **Northeast Region** call the appropriate pager:
(Northeast Region: ME - VA and offshore north of 36°35'N)
Entangled whales: **800-900-3622**
Dead, ship-struck, or injured whales: **978-281-9351**
General right whale sightings: **978-585-8473**

In the **Southeast Region** (includes the Gulf of Mexico):
(Southeast Region: NC - TX and offshore south of 36°35'N)
Entangled, dead, ship-struck, or injured whales: **877-433-8299**
All other right whale sightings: **904-237-4220**

* Sightings in any location can be reported to the **US Coast Guard on Channel 16** *

Identifying Right Whales

Several features should be observed to confirm species identification. These may include:

- ✓ Rough white patches ('callosities') on the head.
- ✓ **Dorsal fin absent** when the whale arches on a dive. (But be cautious -- other species may not show their dorsal fin until they arch up for a deep dive.)
- ✓ Flukes (tails) have smooth trailing edges and taper gradually to narrow pointy tips. (Only right whales, humpbacks, and sperm whales routinely lift their tails when diving.)
- ✓ Distinct 'V'-shaped blow when viewed from directly behind or head on (but not from the side).



V-shaped blow



Right whales are best identified by the presence of callosities on the head. Their body shape is more robust than other whale species, and the flukes are proportionally larger. The flippers are square-ish in shape.



Right whale fluke (above)



Right whale flipper



No dorsal fin (head to the right)



Humpback whale fluke (below)

Photos by NEFSC/PSB

Please help NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) collect vital information on right whales and dead, entangled, or injured whales of any species by **immediately** calling one of the numbers above when these critical sightings are made. **Please make taking video or photographs a priority.** Images of critical sightings are extremely valuable.

If a **right whale** is sighted, *please bear in mind that federal law prohibits all approaches to right whales within 500 yards except under special circumstances.*

If any whale is sighted near gear or appears to be in distress, check for signs of entanglement or injury. However, if no entanglement or injury has been noted, then there is no need to keep the whale in sight.

If an **entangled, injured, or dead** whale is sighted, please try to keep the whale in sight until you can report the sighting to NMFS responders. **Do not attempt to disentangle a whale unless authorized.**

A good reference for identifying other species is: *Guide to Marine Mammals & Turtles of the U.S. Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico* (c) 1999. Rhode Island Sea Grant. To order, call 401-874-6842

Reporting Strategy

For any sighting, be prepared with the following information:

- ✓ Date, time and location of the sighting
- ✓ Number of animals sighted
- ✓ Distinctive features and estimated length of the animal
- ✓ How you can be contacted (i.e. contact information for original report; how an observer can be contacted)
- ✓ Signs of injury or entanglement
- ✓ Description of behavior, any injuries and/or entangling gear
- ✓ If the whale is dead, the condition of the carcass

Spotting Entangled Whales

Spotting entangled whales requires careful observation. Whenever a whale is sighted, look for buoys or lines moving or unusually clumped near the whale or trailing some distance behind. Gear may also be seen wrapped over the whale's back, flippers, tail stock, or through the mouth.

Photographs or video of an entanglement are extremely valuable, especially when they document areas where the gear is entangled on the whale.

Be sure to stay well clear of an entangled whale to avoid spooking it or running over any trailing gear.



Entangled humpback

Identifying Dead Whale Species at Sea

Whale carcasses are typically seen floating belly up. Due to predation and weathering, carcasses may differ significantly from the pictures below. Rely on described body structures for identification. If possible, closely examine the carcass for signs of injuries, such as gashes, bruises, or line marks. **Video or photographs are extremely valuable**, especially close-ups of the areas around the tail stock, flukes, flippers, and any injuries.

Dead right whales

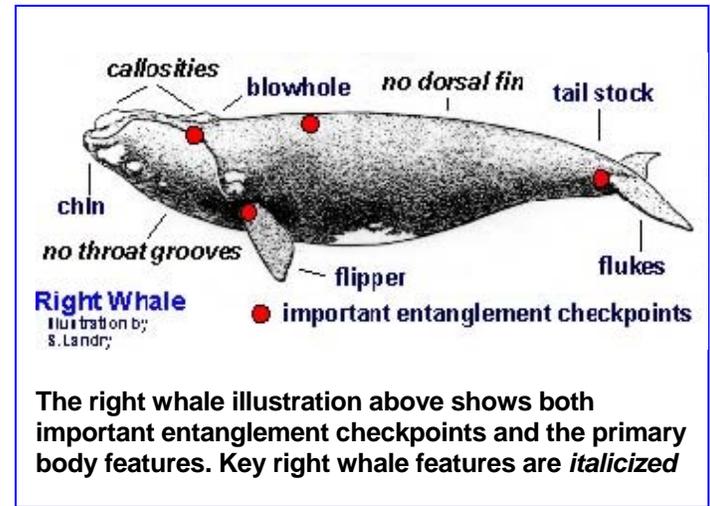
- ✓ Throat grooves absent (belly may have white patches or be completely black.)
- ✓ Flippers squarish in shape and, when the whale is belly-up, both may be up out of the water
- ✓ If floating on its side, note strongly arched mouth that contains long (6+ foot) baleen



Dead right whale (on side: head to right), note arched mouth and baleen. DFO



Dead right whale (belly up: tail closest) NEFSC/Sea Sampling)



The right whale illustration above shows both important entanglement checkpoints and the primary body features. Key right whale features are *italicized*

Right whales follow a migratory path close to shore along the entire U.S. eastern seaboard. This migration is primarily in the early spring and late fall.

Right Whale Critical Habitat Areas:

Cape Cod Bay: 42°04.8'N, 70°10'W; 42°12'N, 70°15'W; 42°12'N, 70°30'W; 41°46.8'N, 70°30'W

Great South Channel: 41°00'N, 69°05'W; 41°40'N, 69°45'W; 42°10'N, 68°31'W; 41°38'N, 68°13'W

Southeast: 31°15'N to 30°15'N & offshore 15 nm; 30°15'N to 28°00'N & offshore 5 nm



Dead humpback whales

- ✓ Throat grooves present
- ✓ Flippers white and about 1/3 the length of the body with knobby bumps on front edge
- ✓ Trailing edge of tail flukes ragged-looking with large barnacles on tips
- ✓ Several grapefruit-sized knobby black bumps on chin and snout



Dead humpback whale

Dead finback whales

- ✓ Throat grooves present (narrower and more numerous than on humpbacks)
- ✓ Flippers smooth, slender, and fairly short
- ✓ Tail flukes have smooth trailing edges and taper to narrow pointy tips
- ✓ Chin smooth and relatively slender



Dead Finback whale (head to right)

Dead minke whales are physically similar to finbacks but are smaller (less than 30 feet long), and their throat grooves do not extend as far aft.