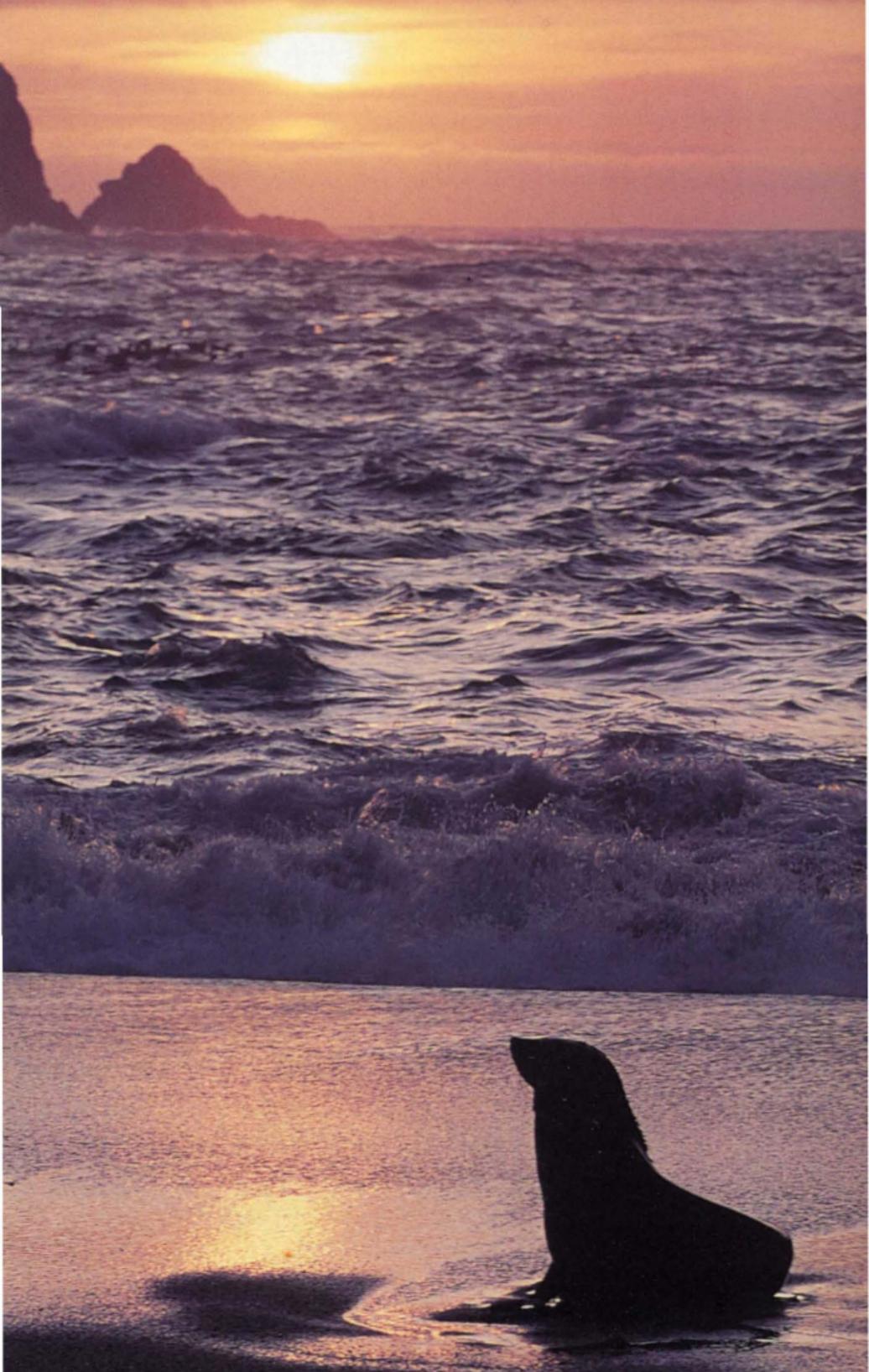


MARINE MAMMALS ON THE BEACH

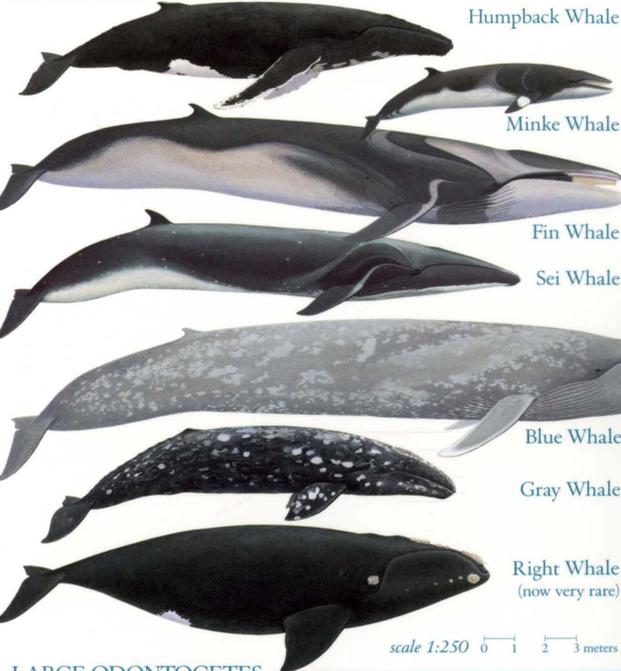


*When and How to Respond
in the Pacific Northwest
and Southern Alaska*

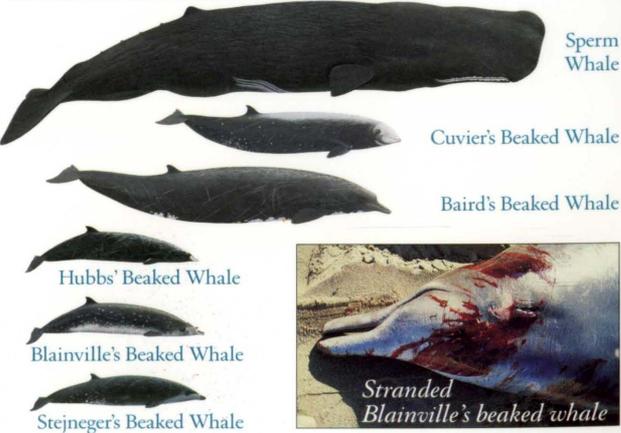
BALEEN WHALES & LARGER TOOTHED WHALES

Whales and dolphins belong to the order Cetacea in two living groups—Mysticeti (baleen whales with paired blowholes) and Odontoceti (toothed whales with one blowhole). The first five mysticetes below are *rorquals*, identifiable by many throat grooves (ventral pleats) and a dorsal fin. Gray whales have two to five deep throat creases and a dorsal hump. Right whales have no grooves or dorsal fin. The sperm whale has teeth, but only on the lower jaws. The North Pacific beaked whales have zero, two, or four teeth and are rare. We encourage the use of a good field guide for more information regarding species identification.

MYSTICETES



LARGE ODONTOCETES



SMALL TOOTHED WHALES, DOLPHINS & PORPOISES

The most common toothed whales in the Northwest are the Dall's porpoise, harbor porpoise, and killer whale.



CETACEANS—ARE THEY STRANDED?

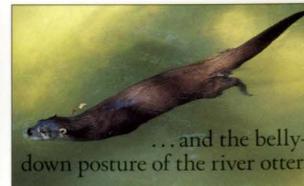
NO—Gray whales feeding close to shore, even shoreward of the first surf line, are common and are not in danger. Some gray whales dive near crab pot bouys to feed on mycids found near crab traps. This activity can give the mistaken impression that the whales are entangled.

YES—Cetaceans cannot survive out of water for very long. They never belong on shore. If you find one ashore, dead or alive, call the stranding network immediately.

SEA OTTERS



RIVER OTTERS



Otters are members of the weasel family that have adapted to life almost entirely in the water. Sea otters are larger than river otters. The common river otter often ventures into the marine environment. Stranding Network volunteers generally do not respond to "stranded" river otters. Sea otters are endangered and seldom come ashore. Sea otters ashore should be treated under the pinniped guidelines.

PINNIPEDS — SEALS & SEA LIONS

Pinnipeds divide their lives between foraging at sea and coming ashore to rest, mate, give birth, suckle their young, and/or molt (shed their old hair). Northwest pinnipeds are classified in two families. Otariids (sea lions and fur seals) have external ear flaps and can rotate their hind flippers under their pelvis to walk on all fours on land. Phocids (seals) have no external ear flaps, and drag their hind limbs, moving like an inchworm on land. Sexual dimorphism is profound in all Northwest pinnipeds, except harbor seals.



PINNIPEDS—ARE THEY STRANDED?

NO—Harbor seal pups are frequently found alone on the beach. This is normal. They are not stranded. Adult female seals are shy and unlikely to rejoin a pup if there is activity nearby. Weaned pups are left to fend for themselves and come ashore to rest while learning to catch their own food. Weaning is a normal and necessary part of the life cycle, but may be stressful. Not all pups survive. While it is tempting to "take them in," their best chance for survival is to be left alone and on the beach. Pinnipeds on shore should first be considered normal.

NO—Elephant seals come ashore once a year to molt. This natural process takes weeks on the beach to complete. During this time their breathing is irregular, eyes weep, noses run, and the skin looks horrible. This is normal. YES—Animals entangled in nets, other fishing gear, or obviously injured are stranded. YES—Animals harassed by people or dogs should be reported to enforcement authorities.



Marine mammals have stranded along the Northwest coast for 40 million years. Whales, otters, seals, and sea lions were hunted to near extinction and strandings became a rare event. As some species recovered, strandings increased. Strandings can be live or dead, a single animal or a group of related individuals. Causes can be anything from a calf separated from its mother in heavy weather to death from old age. Mortal contact with vessels, oil spills, and entanglement in fishing gear are common anthropogenic (human-caused) events which can lead to a stranding.

RESPONDING TO A STRANDING

SAFETY FIRST! These are wild animals in a stressed condition. They do bite. Some may carry diseases which can be transmitted to pets and humans.

Reporting a stranding promptly is the best way to help stranded animals. It also provides biologists valuable opportunities to study the animals and their environment.

DO

- Keep people and dogs away.
- Observe and report the following to an official agency:
 1. Identify—Distinguish between a baleen whale and a toothed whale; seal or sea lion or otter. Estimate size, note color, and comment on the nature of vocalizations.
 2. General Condition—Is the animal dead or alive, lethargic, injured, bleeding, or entangled?
 3. Location—Be as precise as possible, making note of landmarks and beach accessibility.
 4. Colored Tags—On which flipper do they appear? What color are they? Can you safely read the tag numbers?
- Keep live cetaceans cool and moist by covering the body with wet towels (if available). Keep water from getting down the blowhole. Avoid covering the blowhole.

DON'T ...

- ... move, touch, or disturb the animal.
- ... try to drive animals back into the water.
- ... pour water on a seal, sea lion, or sea otter.
- ... try to feed any wild animal.

Marine mammals are protected by federal law. It is illegal for unauthorized persons to disturb, handle, or feed them. It is also illegal to collect or possess parts of marine mammals from dead strandings.

In strandings of endangered species, or in some locations in California, rehabilitation and subsequent release of stranded animals may be considered. In cases of severe injury, animals may be humanely euthanized.

Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) established the Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. It is comprised of several government agencies and cooperating scientists operating on a volunteer basis. These volunteers respond to strandings either directly or by advising those at the scene on how to proceed. Data collected from strandings become part of a national database used to establish baseline information on marine mammal biology and toxins in the environment. Please understand that not all stranding events require or receive a formal response from the volunteers.

Marine Mammal Stranding Network Contacts

Alaska

NMFS Office, Anchorage

1-907-271-5006

NMFS Office of Protected Resources, Juneau

1-907-586-7235

United States Coast Guard

VHF 22A

British Columbia

BC Stranding Network

1-800-665-5939

Washington

NMFS Office of Enforcement Hotline

1-800-853-1964

Washington Stranding Network

1-206-526-6733

Oregon

Oregon State Police

1-800-452-7888

Northern California

The Marine Mammal Center

1-415-289-SEAL (7325)

A mass stranding of Sperm Whales at Florence, Oregon, in 1979



This publication is sponsored by:

Oregon State University Marine Mammal Program & Oregon Sea Grant, Newport, OR; NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Enforcement, Seattle, WA; The Marine Mammal Center, Sausalito, CA. Writers: Sharon Nieu Kirk, Barbara Lagerquist, Pieter Folkens, & Bruce Mate; front photo: John Jansen; back photo Robert L. Pitman. Printed on a waterproof, environmentally-friendly synthetic paper. Design, illustration, & interior photographs: Pieter Folkens.

© 2000 A HIGHER PORPOISE DESIGN GROUP

