

Glossary

Aquarium A place where fish and other water-dwelling animals are kept alive in tanks and pools, so people can study and learn about them. An aquarium is also the name for the small fish tank that you can have in your home.

Barnacle A small shellfish that fixes itself tightly to things in the sea, such as rocks, the bottoms of boats, and the skin of whales. Barnacles feed by combing plankton and other tiny materials out of the water around them, so they help to keep seawater clean.

Blowhole The opening on the top of a whale's head through which the whale breathes. Baleen whales have a pair of blowholes, like the nostrils in your nose, while toothed whales have just one. A whale closes its blowholes when it dives.

Blubber The layer of thick fat that helps whales to float and to stay warm in cold water.

Calf The name for the young of some large mammals, including whales, hippopotamuses, elephants, and cows.

Cetaceans The family of mammals that includes whales, porpoises, and dolphins. Cetaceans spend their entire lives in water.

Echolocation A way of using sound to locate objects by sending out a call and then listening to the echoes. Bats and toothed whales use echolocation to "see" in the dark.

Equator An imaginary line around the middle of the Earth, equally distant from the North and South Poles. The equator divides the sphere of the Earth into two equal halves: the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere ("hemi" means "half"). When it is winter in the northern hemisphere, it is summer in the southern hemisphere.

Evolution The process by which living things gradually change over time, which can sometimes result in new species.

Filter feeding A method of eating that moves water through a comb-like structure to trap pieces of food. Baleen whales are filter feeders. So are some other animals, including barnacles, oysters, and many other shellfish.

Fin A thin, blade-like body part that helps an animal move through the water. Most fish have fins, and many whales have fins on their backs. A fin has no bones.

Flipper A limb that helps an animal to move through water. The flippers of whales evolved from the front legs of their land-dwelling ancestors. Flippers have bones, like your arms and hands.

Flukes The two lobes of a whale's tail. Some species of whales lift their flukes above the water when they start a big dive. This is called "fluking."

Harpoon A long pointed weapon, often with a long rope attached, that is either thrown by hand or fired from a gun. Harpoons can be used by people hunting whales and large sea fish.

Krill Tiny sea animals that look like small shrimp. Krill are a main food source for baleen whales as well as many seabirds and fish. They are an essential part of the ocean food web. Without them, most of the larger sea animals would not exist.

Mammals The group of animals that feed milk to their babies, with most giving birth to their babies instead of laying eggs. Mammals range in size from tiny shrews and humans to blue whales.

Migration The movement of animals over long distances. Many animals migrate with the seasons, spending winter in one place and summer in another. Migration helps animals to reach good feeding grounds and safe places to have their babies.

Oxygen The colorless gas that all animals and plants need in order to live. Oxygen is produced by plants as they grow. Half of the oxygen in every breath you take is made by plankton in the ocean.

Plankton Tiny living organisms including animals, plants, and seaweeds that live in the sea. Plankton that are plants or seaweeds are called phytoplankton, while plankton that are animals are called zooplankton.

Pod The name for a group of whales. Some whales are found in small pods made up of a few family members, while others travel in large pods that can number in the hundreds.

Pollution The act of putting damaging material into the world around us. Pollution makes water, land, and air unhealthy. Plastic is one example of pollution in our oceans. We can help to keep the oceans healthy by using less plastic and by picking up rubbish wherever we go.

Predator An animal that kills and eats other animals in order to live. Examples include lions, hawks, spiders, and orcas.

School A large group of fish moving through the water together. A school of fish that has stopped moving—to feed, for example—is called a shoal.

Snout The projecting nose and mouth of an animal, especially a mammal.

Spermaceti A white waxy substance that is found in the head of a sperm whale and may help the whale to echolocate and navigate. People once used spermaceti in makeup, perfumes, candles, and ointments.

Ton A unit of mass used in the United States. A ton is 2,000 pounds.
 = 1.4 ton
 = 14 tons

Tonne (metric ton) A unit of mass used outside the United States. A tonne is 1,000 kilogram, or 2,204.6 pounds.

Tusk A long tooth that has developed to be a weapon or a sense organ, or just for display.

Whales A general term for members of the cetacean family, often used to refer to whales, dolphins, and porpoises together. Whales are large, air-breathing mammals that spend their entire lives in the water. They are found in all of the oceans and in some rivers.