



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

Information on the species and habitats around the coasts and sea of the British Isles

Blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

MarLIN – Marine Life Information Network
Marine Evidence-based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA) Review

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A report from:

The Marine Life Information Network, Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom.

Please note. This MarESA report is a dated version of the online review. Please refer to the website for the most up-to-date version [<https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/104>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

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See online review for
distribution map

Distribution data supplied by the Ocean
Biogeographic Information System (OBIS). To
interrogate UK data visit the NBN Atlas.

Researched by	Morvan Barnes	Refereed by	Admin
Authority	(Linnaeus, 1758)		
Other common names	-	Synonyms	-

Summary

Description

The blue whale *Balaenoptera musculus* is a baleen whale and can be recognised as such by the plates of baleen (rather than teeth) suspended from the upper jaw and the two blowholes on the upper body. The blue whale is slender bodied and, being the largest whale species, can reach up to 33 m in length. It is a member of the rorqual family with the characteristic ventral pleats of skin under the eye and the relatively flat and broad jaw. The ventral pleats extend beyond the navel. The small flippers are less than one-fifth of the body length. It has only one prominent ridge on the snout. The head is broad and U-shaped, and the head colouration is symmetrical. The dorsal fin is very small and set far back on the body. The blue whale has a mottled dorsal and lateral colouration with white under the flippers.

Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

Occasionally seen off the western coasts of Ireland and possibly further north.

Global distribution

-

 **Habitat**

The blue whale is an open ocean whale, not often seen near the coast in north-west Europe. It can be found at the surface or diving down to 150 metres.

 **Depth range**

-

 **Identifying features**

- Up to 33 m in length.
- Uniform mottled grey dorsal and lateral colouration; white under the flippers.
- Broad tail flukes from tip to tip.
- Very small dorsal fin set far back on the body.
- Up to 88 ventral pleats ending past the navel.

 **Additional information**

The blue whale can be confused with the fin whale *Balaenoptera physalus* but is recognised by its broad and U-shaped head, a very small dorsal fin that is set far back on the body, and symmetrical head colouration. Blue whales are usually found alone or in pairs, although in feeding areas up to a dozen have been seen together. It rarely breeches, and when diving, it will often show the tail flukes. Dives may last up to 30 minutes long (Kinze, 2002).

 **Listed by** **Further information sources**

Search on:



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