



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

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

Fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)

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

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2008-06-24

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/105>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

This review can be cited as:

Barnes, M.K.S. 2008. *Balaenoptera physalus* Fin whale. In Tyler-Walters H. and Hiscock K. (eds) *Marine Life Information Network: Biology and Sensitivity Key Information Reviews*, [on-line]. Plymouth: Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom. DOI <https://dx.doi.org/10.17031/marlin.sp.105.1>



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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

Balaenoptera physalus 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 fin whale is slender bodied and can reach up to 24 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 pointed and V-shaped, the dorsal fin is a moderate size and set less far back on the body, and the head colouration is asymmetrical. The fin whale has a dark dorsal and lateral colouration with light streaks and the belly is white. The left side of the head is grey, while much of the right side is white in colour.

📍 Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

Occasionally seen off the coasts of northern and north-western Scotland and southern Ireland.

📍 Global distribution

-

 **Habitat**

The fin 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 over 230 metres in depth.

 **Depth range**

-

 **Identifying features**

- Up to 24 m in length.
- Dark dorsal and lateral colouration with light streaks; the belly is white.
- Left side of head is grey, right side is white.
- Broad tail flukes from tip to tip.
- Medium-sized dorsal fin set two-thirds down the body.
- Up to 100 ventral pleats ending past the navel.

 **Additional information**

The fin whale can be confused with the blue whale *Balaenoptera musculus* but can be recognised by the pointed and V-shaped head with an asymmetrical colouration and the moderate sized dorsal fin that is set less far back on the body. Fin whales are often slightly more social than other rorquals and tend to gather in pods of up to 7 or more individuals. It does occasionally breach but when diving, rarely show the tail flukes. Dives may last up to 10 minutes long (Kinze, 2002).

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

Search on:



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