



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

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

Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

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

Morvan Barnes

2008-06-02

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/106>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

This review can be cited as:

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A breaching male humpback whale.
 Photographer: Dan Bayley
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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	(Borowski, 1781)		
Other common names	-	Synonyms	-

Summary

🔍 Description

The humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* 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 humpback whale is relatively robust rorqual and can reach up to 16 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. At close range, it is one of the easiest whales to identify. It has extremely long distinctive flippers with a white colouration and knobs on the leading edge. The dorsal fin is low and usually sits on a hump. The head has a single ridge and is covered with numerous bumps. It is a grey-black colour dorsally and laterally, and is white underneath.

📍 Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

Occasionally seen off the coasts of northern Scotland.

📍 Global distribution

-

🏠 Habitat

The humpback whale is an coastal whale. It can be found at the surface or diving down to several hundred metres.

↓ Depth range

-

🔍 Identifying features

- Up to 16 m in length.
- Uniform grey-black dorsal and lateral colouration; white underneath.
- Large, white flippers up to one-third of body length with knobs on leading edge.
- Broad tail flukes white with white patches underneath.
- Small dorsal fin two-thirds down the body, usually atop a hump.
- Top of head is covered with knobs.
- Less than 35 ventral pleats ending past the navel.

🏛️ Additional information

Humpback whales are usually found in groups of two or three, although in feeding areas larger aggregations may develop. It is quite acrobatic and may perform full breaches, and when diving, it will often show the tail flukes. Dives may last up to 7 minutes long (Kinze, 2002).

✓ Listed by



🔗 Further information sources

Search on:



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