



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

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

Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

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

Morvan Barnes

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/112>]. 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. *Physeter macrocephalus* Sperm 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/marlinsp.112.1>



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A breaching sperm whale.
 Photographer: Andrew Pearson
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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 *Physeter macrocephalus*,
Physeter macrocephalus
 Linnaeus, 1758

Summary

Description

Physeter catodon is a toothed whale and can be recognised as such by the single blowhole and the presence of teeth (rather than baleen). It is an easily recognisable whale both at a distance and at close range. It has a large and distinctly square upper jaw which projects above the narrow lower jaw. The body is black to charcoal grey in colour, while the inside of the mouth and the lips are white. The blowhole is positioned at the front of the head. A dorsal hump is present two-thirds down the body followed by a serrated midline. The flippers are almost rectangular.

Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

Found off the coasts of northern Scotland, in the north North Sea and off the western coasts of Ireland, although individuals have been washed up at various other locations around the coasts of Britain.

Global distribution

-

Habitat

The sperm whale is an oceanic deep-sea species that may dive down to a few kilometers in depth.

↓ Depth range

-

🔍 Identifying features

- Up to 18 m in length.
- Small dorsal hump two-thirds down the body followed by smaller humps.
- Large square head up to 30% of the body length.
- Narrow lower jaw with a white inside colouring to the mouth.
- S-shaped blowhole at the front left side of the head.
- About 20 peg-like teeth in each side of the lower jaw.

🏛️ Additional information

Sperm whales are usually found in medium to large groups of up to 50 individuals, although bulls are sometimes seen alone. The blow is unique amongst whales by being obliquely forward directed. The tail flukes will often appear before a deep dive. Dives may last up to 2 hours long (Kinze, 2002).

✓ Listed by



🔗 Further information sources

Search on:



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