



FACTSHEET

Southern Right Whale



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Common Name: Southern Right Whale

Scientific Name: *Eubalaena australis*

Conservation Status: Listed as Least Concern under ICUN (2014). Listed as Vulnerable (Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 (Western Australia)). The waters around Rottnest Island are a designated Marine Reserve. All cetaceans are protected within the Australian Whale Sanctuary under the EPBC Act. The Sanctuary includes all Commonwealth waters from the three nautical mile State waters limit out to the boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone (out to 200 nm and further in some places). The EPBC Act also classifies Southern Right Whales as Endangered.

Habitat: Off-shore waters

Body length: 13-17 m

Weight: 7-8.5 tonnes

Gestation period: 355 days

Number of young: 1

Description:

The Southern Right Whale is a large baleen whale. This means that it has large plates made of keratin which hang from its upper jaw instead of teeth. Baleen whales filter the seawater to extract their food.

Southern Right Whales slightly smaller than the two northern species and are mainly black or blackish brown but occasionally can have white streaks or patches. They do not have a dorsal fin but their two pectoral fins are short and paddle like. Their flukes (tail fins) are black and have smooth trailing edges. They have large heads and strongly arched jaws.

These whales have distinctive whitish or yellowish lower jaws, chins and rostrums (front part of the head). This is caused by small crustaceans known as Whale Lice. The patterns these lice form are different on each whale and so can be used to identify them.

Diet:

Krill and other euphausiids (small shrimp-like crustaceans).



In the Wild:

Southern Right Whales form large groups in breeding areas but otherwise live in small groups or on their own. They are slow swimmers but can be very acrobatic. They can “head stand” by tipping themselves vertical and waving their flukes in the air.

Occasionally they will breach (jump out of the water) up to ten times in a row.

Southern Right Whales will often use their broad fins to ‘sail’ by sticking them out of the water to catch the wind. Their feeding grounds are in the cold Antarctic waters. They migrate to their warmer breeding grounds further north in the waters around Australia, South Africa and South America.

Threats:

- Illegal whaling
- Pollution
- Noise pollution (noise of ships, seismic surveying)
- Injury from shipping
- Stranding
- Climate change affecting their migration routes, breeding and feeding sites, and food supply

DID YOU KNOW?

It is believed that Southern Right Whales got their name from the historic whaling industry. They were the “right” whales to hunt because they swim quite slowly, were easy to approach by boat, when they were killed their bodies floated and they gave huge amounts of oil and whalebone. They were almost hunted to extinction.