

WHALE FACTS

NARWHAL FACTS

- The narwhal [whale](#) is a medium sized marine mammal that can be found swimming in the Canadian Arctic and Greenlandic waters all year round.
- This marine mammal belongs to the [toothed whale](#) suborder and is part of the [cetacean](#) species which also includes [dolphins](#) and [porpoises](#).
- The name “Narwhal” comes from the old Norse word “nar”, which means “corpse like” when describing its grayish molted coloring which resembles the corpse of drowned sailors.
- In addition to being called the narwhal these marine animals have also gone by the names of Monodon monoceros (one-toothed) and Qilalugaq qernartaq (the one that points to the sky).

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The narwhal whale is unique animal among the whale species as it is the only cetacean that is known to have a long ivory tusk that extends from the upper left side of its jaw, which can measure up to 7 – 10 feet in length.

On very rare occasions the male narwhal may also grow a second tusk, however this is extremely unlikely.

Female narwhals on the other hand rarely grow a visible tusk.

As for their size these marine mammals can grow to be 13 -20 ft. long and weigh as much as 3,500 pounds.

In terms of appearance the narwhals body is thickest in the midsection and tapers down towards the head and flukes.

They have a pair of short flippers that help them swim and turn in the water and their rear flukes assist with propelling them forward.

At birth the narwhal whale appears its darkest with molted black – grayish coloring and white spotted patterns.

As they grow older however their dark coloring begins to lighten.

DIET

When it comes to hunting for food narwhals have a relatively small diet.

These whales can be found hunting flatfish, cod, [shrimp](#), Gonatus [squid](#) and various forms of [benthic prey](#).

When searching for prey these marine mammals have been known to make some of the deepest dives of any [marine mammal](#) with some dives reaching depths of nearly 5,000 feet.

During these long dives the narwhal can remain underwater for up to 25 minutes before resurfacing for air.

In order to assist them with finding food narwhals will use echolocation in order to determine the location of their prey and monitor potential objects blocking their path.

MIGRATION

Narwhals live in or near the Canadian Arctic and Greenlandic waters throughout the year.

In many cases they can be seen swimming in pods of 15 – 20, although numbers can reach into the thousands during [migration periods](#).

They follow the distribution of ice and move towards coastal waters during the warmer months.

During the fall and winter they migrate away from coastal waters and towards the off shore in order to avoid being trapped by ice.

In the winter when large areas of water are frozen over, small groups of narwhal may be found swimming in locations containing only 5% open water.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATION

- When it comes to communication narwhal whales communicate using high pitched clicks, whistles, squeaks and bangs.
- Unfortunately not much is known about the meaning of these vocal sounds, however they are likely used to inform other whales of important information and keep track of pod members.
- In addition to using clicks to communicate these sounds may also be used for echolocation in order to search for food and navigate the ocean.
- In terms of social structure narwhals tend to travel in groups of up to 10 members with some pods growing closer to 20 members.
- During the summer numerous pods may gather together and form large aggregations of anywhere from 100 – 1,000 narwhals.
- During this time males may be seen crossing tusks with one another which is may be used as a way to determine their social hierarchy and level within the group.

BREEDING

- The average [gestation period](#) (the period from conception to birth) for female narwhals is 14 – 15 months.
- Mating typically occurs during the spring when male narwhals spend their time courting the females and competing with one another.
- The narwhals tusks are believed to play a possible role in mating as some narwhals have been observed crossing tusks which appears to mimic fencing behavior.
- This type of behavior may be used to display social status or youthfulness and strength among various narwhals.
- Some whales have also been found with broken tusks which may indicate fighting or aggressive behavior, however these marine mammals are rarely ever seen fighting one another.
- The rapid growth of their tusks which occurs during sexual maturity also suggests that their tusks likely play a large role during mating season.
- After birth the female narwhal will nurse her young and provide it with fatty nutrient rich milk.
- The nursing period may go on for 1 1/2 – 2 years in order to ensure that the child has a healthy development.
- Male narwhals generally reach sexually maturity between 8 – 10 years of age while females reach maturity between 4 – 7 years.
- Once fully matured these marine mammals can begin mating and giving birth to their own young.
- Healthy narwhal whales are believed to have a lifespan of up to 50 years.
- As far as reproductive frequency goes limited information suggests that females bear offspring once every 3 years.

ENDANGERED STATUS

The narwhal is currently considered a stable species, however due to the whales geographically narrow habitat it is considered vulnerable to changes in the climate.

These whales inhabit the Arctic ocean year round and move from coastal to off shore locations between migration periods.

They are often hunted in Canada and Greenland for their ivory tusks.

The current estimated population for narwhal is 25,000 – 45,000.

10 ASTONISHING NARWHAL FACTS

- 1) Due to the narwhal's large ivory tusk these marine mammal is often referred to as the unicorns of the sea.
- 2) The narwhal makes up one of around 80 known species of cetacea which include all species of whale, dolphin and porpoise.
- 3) Most narwhal's grow a single large tusk from the upper left side of their jaw, however around one in 500 males are known to grow a second large tusk from the right side of its upper jaw.
- 4) A narwhal's tusk is believed to be a sexual characteristic that is used to attract a mating partner of the opposite sex. It has also been observed being used to show dominance among males during mating season as they can be seen fencing or crossing tusks against one another during competitive mating periods.
- 5) Reaching depths in excess of 5,000 ft. these animals are known to make one of the deepest dives of all marine mammals.
- 6) Despite their small size these marine mammals can be found swimming in the cold/frozen Canadian Arctic and Greenlandic waters throughout the year.
- 7) Although narwhal's generally stay in groups of 20 or less in the summer groups may gather together and form large aggregations of 500 – 1000 narwhal's are more.
- 8) Because the narwhal is a marine mammal it is warm-blooded, produces milk, gives birth to its young and breathes air.
- 9) Unlike other toothed whales the narwhal's only teeth are the tusks that it grows.
- 10) As a comparison the narwhal is about the same size of an adult beluga whale (minus the tusk).

<https://www.whalefacts.org/narwhal-facts/>