

Right whales return to the First Coast

With only 300-400 in existence, the North Atlantic right whale is one of the the rarest of all large whales. Each winter many of these whales migrate to the Georgia and North Florida coasts, their only known calving area. The third annual Right Whale Festival will be held in Jacksonville Beach on Saturday to raise awareness of the dangers they face.

By Kyle Bentele, kyle.bentele@jacksonville.com

Online at jacksonville.com/rightwhales

Average dimensions
Length: 45-55 ft
Weight: up to 70 tons
Lifespan: Though little is known about the right whale's lifespan, it has been known to live up to at least 50 years

Callosities
 Natural calluses on the whale. The callosities appear white because of infestations of whale lice. The callosity locations are unique to each whale and assist in identifying individuals.

Forty percent of the whale's body weight is blubber.

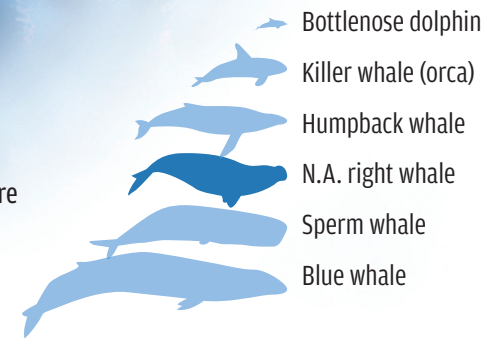
Baleen
 Baleen, a filter-like barrier in the whale's mouth, filters out tiny crustaceans by the billions. Right whales swim through the water with their mouths open, allowing water and plankton to flow through the baleen. An adult whale needs to consume a minimum of 400,000 calories a day.

Fluke
 Reaching only up to 10 mph, right whales are among the slowest swimming whales. They can dive to 1,000 feet and can stay underwater for up to 40 minutes.

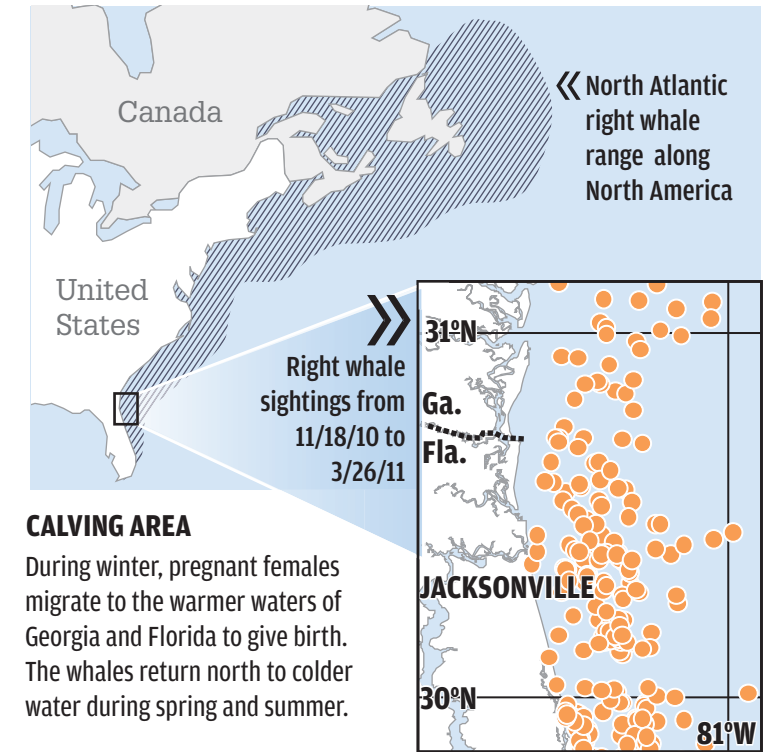
Calves
 Females give birth to first calves after they are 9-10 years old. The calves are usually 14-15 feet long at birth and stay with their mothers for about a year.

White patches are unique to each individual.

WHALE SIZE COMPARISON



RIGHT WHALE RANGE



CALVING AREA

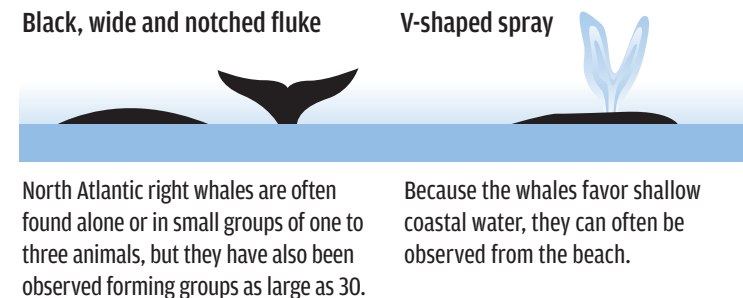
During winter, pregnant females migrate to the warmer waters of Georgia and Florida to give birth. The whales return north to colder water during spring and summer.

OTHER RIGHT WHALE SPECIES RANGES

- North Atlantic right whale
- North Pacific right whale
- Southern right whale



RECOGNIZING THE NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE



North Atlantic right whales are often found alone or in small groups of one to three animals, but they have also been observed forming groups as large as 30.

Because the whales favor shallow coastal water, they can often be observed from the beach.

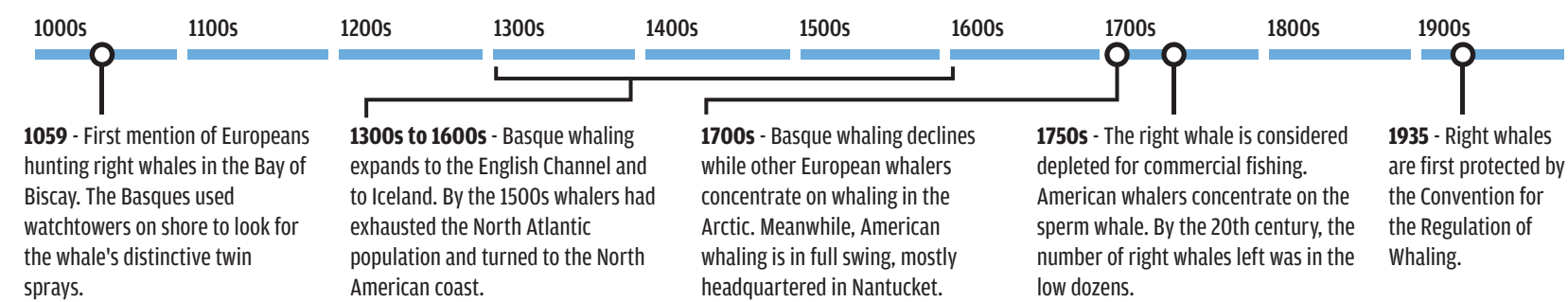
WHY THEY ARE ENDANGERED

Right whales were named because early whalers knew they were the "right" whales to hunt. Their slow speed meant they were easy to catch and their blubber-rich bodies floated after they were killed. After extensive whaling the whales were considered depleted for commercial purposes by 1750.

Today, the right whale's main threats are ship collisions and entanglements in fishing gear.

Two to six whales are killed each year, with half of them killed by ship strikes or by entanglements. Additional man-made threats include habitat degradation and pollution. Natural predators include large sharks and killer whales. The species is listed as endangered by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

RIGHT WHALING HISTORY



JACKSONVILLE BEACH RIGHT WHALE FESTIVAL



Saturday, Nov. 19
 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Jacksonville Beach Seawalk Pavilion
 Hosted by the Sea to Shore Alliance and NOAA Fisheries Service
 More information at rightwhalefestival.org

Activities include:
 5K and Fun Run
 Beach cleanup
 Live music
 Booths and exhibits
 Kid's activities

Sources: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; National Marine Fisheries Service; The American Cetacean Society; Encyclopedia Britannica; Sea To Shore Alliance