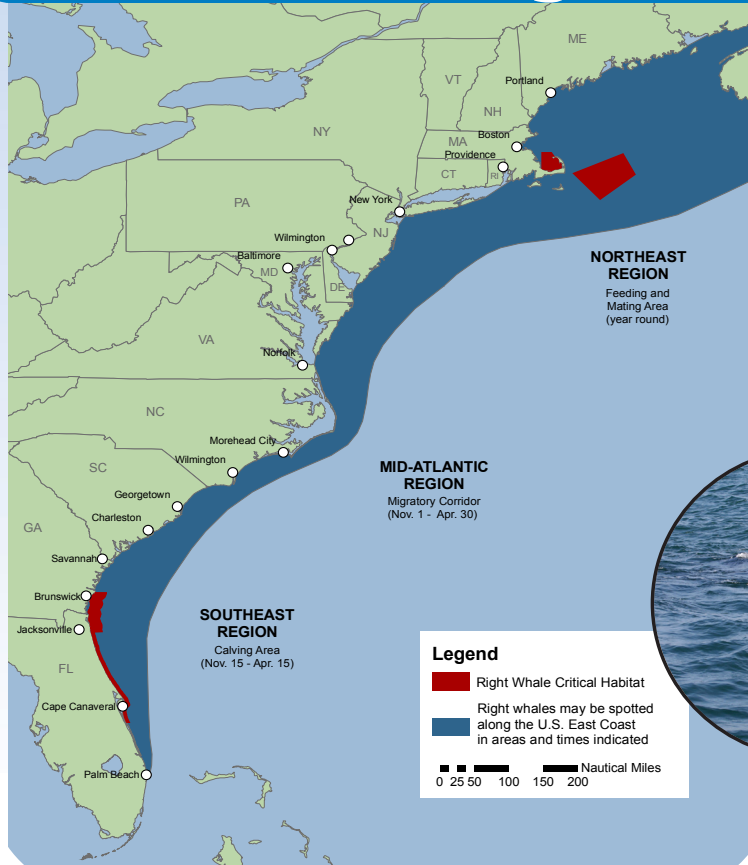




## Marine Mammal Fact Sheet

# North Atlantic

# Right Whale



Cape Cod Bay and Great South Channel were designated as critical habitat because they are important feeding areas. The Southeast U.S. was designated as critical habitat because it is a calving area.

**W**ith as few as about 300 remaining, North Atlantic right whales are one of the most endangered whales in the world. The species' recovery is dependent upon the protection of each remaining whale.

Year round, right whales can be found from Cape Cod to Nova Scotia – an area the whales use for feeding and mating. Each fall, pregnant females travel from this area to their only known – and likely only – calving area in the warm, calm coastal waters off the Southeast Atlantic Coast. Here they give birth and nurse their young. When spring arrives, mothers and their calves make the long journey back north.



The whales migration route hugs the U.S. Atlantic coastline, leading them through nearshore waters laden with human activity, especially heavy vessel traffic. To make matters worse, right whales are difficult to see because they have dark skin and no dorsal fin. They also spend a considerable amount of time at or near the water's surface, and most of the time, they are oblivious to dangers around them.

## KEEP YOUR DISTANCE – LIVES DEPEND ON IT!

Approaching or remaining within 500 yards of a right whale is against Federal law! Violations can result in civil or criminal penalties with fines up to \$55,000. This applies to operators of all types of watercraft (motorized and non-motorized) and aircraft, as well as swimmers and divers.

Calving season is the most vulnerable time in the entire life of a right whale – any disturbance could affect calving, nursing, or other behaviors critical to the survival of the species.

## STEER CLEAR!

**Federal regulations mandate the following if within 500 yards of a right whale:**

- If underway, all watercraft must steer a course away from the right whale(s) and immediately leave the area at a slow, safe speed.
- All aircraft must take a course away from right whale(s) and immediately leave the area at a constant airspeed.

## IT'S UP TO YOU!

### Help Prevent Extinction of North Atlantic Right Whales

- Stay at least 500 yards away from right whales – it's Federal law!
- Operate watercraft at a slow, safe speed of 10 knots or less in areas where right whales are known to occur.
- Move away slowly if a right whale approaches you.
- Always wear polarized sunglasses and stay alert in right whale habitat. Even though right whales are large in size, they have dark skin and no dorsal fin, making them EXTREMELY difficult to see!
- Avoid boating during times of poor visibility, particularly at night.
- Know how to properly identify right whales and immediately report injured, entangled, or dead right whale sightings to the U.S. Coast Guard via marine radio VHF Ch. 16.

*Marine Mammal Fact Sheet*

## North Atlantic

**Right Whale****IDENTIFICATION**

- Baleen whales.
- Adults are 45 to 50 feet in length and can weigh up to 55 tons.
- Black to dark-grey skin sometimes with white splotches on belly or "chin."
- Large white bumps on top of the head called callosities.
- Paddle-shaped, short, stubby flippers.
- Deeply-notched tail with smooth trailing edges.
- **NO** dorsal fin on its back.
- V-shaped blow from blowhole when whale exhales, which is visible only when positioned directly in front of or directly behind the whale.

**Most of the time, right whales are difficult to spot and identify – a distant blow may be all you see.**

paddle-shaped flippers



FWC

Callosities



NOAA

**BEHAVIOR**

- May not move away from boat's path.
- Movement may be unpredictable.
- Mothers and calves travel together.
- Calves may be curious and approach vessels.
- Pregnant females don't eat during calving season; therefore, they need to conserve energy for giving birth, nursing, and migrating northward to feeding areas.
- Right whales spend a considerable amount of time at or near the water's surface, particularly mothers and calves.
- Resting right whales are oblivious to dangers around them.

Deeply-notched tail with smooth trailing edges



NOAA

Broad flat back with no dorsal fin

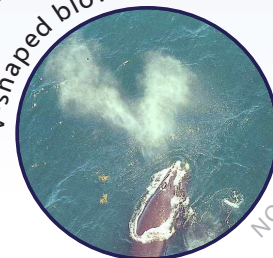


NOAA

**BIOLOGY**

- Females are larger than males.
- Sexually mature at around age 10.
- Produce one offspring every 3 to 5 years.
- Filter feeders using baleen plates.
- Feed on dense patches of zooplankton called copepods.
- Nurse for 10-12 months.
- Capable of living more than 100 years.

V-shaped blow



NOAA

**DID YOU KNOW...**

- **Approximately 1/3 of all known right whale mortalities are a result of vessel collisions or entanglement in fixed fishing gear.**
- **The loss of one or two reproducing female right whales per year from human activity could lead to extinction.**
- **NOAA estimates that a female has to give birth to four calves to replace herself in the population. Survivorship studies suggest two of the calves will likely die; of the two that may live, one will most likely be male.**
- **Vessels as small as 43 feet are capable of killing right whales.**
- **Right whales that are resting at the surface may be oblivious to dangers around them.**

For more information about right whales, visit <http://rightwhalesouth.nmfs.noaa.gov>

**About NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office**

We are dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, enforcement, and habitat conservation. NOAA Fisheries Service is a leading voice for commercial and recreational fisheries and continues to focus its efforts on sustaining our marine resources. Visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>.