



Guide to Reporting Whale Sightings

Please help NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) collect vital information on right whales and dead, entangled, or injured whales of any species by **immediately** calling one of the numbers below when these critical sightings are made. **Please make taking video or photographs a priority.** Images of critical sightings are extremely valuable.

If any whale is sighted near gear or appears to be in distress, check for signs of entanglement or injury. However, if no entanglement or injury has been noted, then there is no need to keep the whale in sight.

If a **right whale** is sighted, **please bear in mind that federal law prohibits all approaches to right whales within 500 yards except under special circumstances.** For more information, please visit <http://rwhalesightings.nefsc.noaa.gov/>.

If an **entangled, injured, or dead whale** is sighted, please try to keep the whale in sight until you can report the sighting to NMFS responders. **Do not attempt to disentangle a whale unless authorized.**

Reporting Strategy

For any critical sighting, be prepared with the following information:

- ✓ Date, time, and location of the sighting
- ✓ Distinctive features and estimated length of animal
- ✓ Signs of injury or entanglement
- ✓ Description of behavior, injuries, and entangling gear
- ✓ If the whale is dead, the condition of the carcass
- ✓ How you can be contacted (i.e. contact information for original report; how an observer can be contacted)

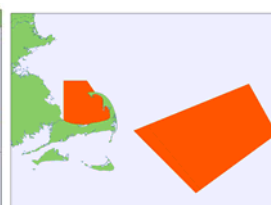
In the **Northeast Region** call the appropriate pager:
Entangled whales: **800-900-3622**
Dead, ship-struck, or injured whales: **978-281-9351**
General right whale sightings: **978-585-8473**

In the **Southeast Region** (includes the Gulf of Mexico):
Entangled, dead, ship-struck, or injured whales:
877-433-8299
All other right whale sightings: **877-433-8299.**

In both regions, reports can also be relayed through U.S. Coast Guard stations.



NMFS Atlantic Administrative Divisions



New England Right Whale Critical Habitat Areas



Southeast U.S. Right Whale Critical Habitat Area

Northeast Region: ME - VA and offshore north of 36°35'N
Southeast Region: NC - TX and offshore south of 36°35'N

Right Whale Critical Habitat Areas: **

Cape Cod Bay: 42°04.8'N, 70°10'W; 42°12'N, 70°15'W; 42°12'N, 70°30'W; 41°46.8'N, 70°30'W

Great South Channel: 41°00'N, 69°05'W; 41°40'N, 69°45'W; 42°10'N, 68°31'W; 41°38'N, 68°13'W

Southeast: 31°15'N to 30°15'N & offshore 15 nm; 30°15'N to 28°00'N & offshore 5 nm

** Right whales follow a migratory path close to shore along the entire U.S. eastern seaboard. This migration is primarily in the early spring and late fall.

Identifying Right Whales

Several features should be observed to confirm species identification. These may include:

- ✓ Rough white patches ('callosities') on the head.
- ✓ Dorsal fin absent when the whale arches on a dive. (But be cautious--other species may not show their dorsal fin until they arch up for a deep dive.)
- ✓ Flukes (tails) have smooth trailing edges and taper gradually to narrow pointy tips. (Only right whales, humpbacks, and sperm whales routinely lift their tails when diving.)
- ✓ Distinct 'V'-shaped blow when viewed from directly behind or head on (but not from the side).

(right) Right whale aerial view, note white patches (callosities) on the head (see arrows in photo) NEFSC/PSB



From the air, right whales are best identified by the presence of the callosities on the head. Their body shape is more robust than other whale species, and the flukes are proportionally larger. The flippers are typically harder to see.



(above) Right whale aerial view, note V-shaped spout NEFSC/PSB



(above) Right whale fluke (to the right) Humpback whale fluke NEFSC/PSB



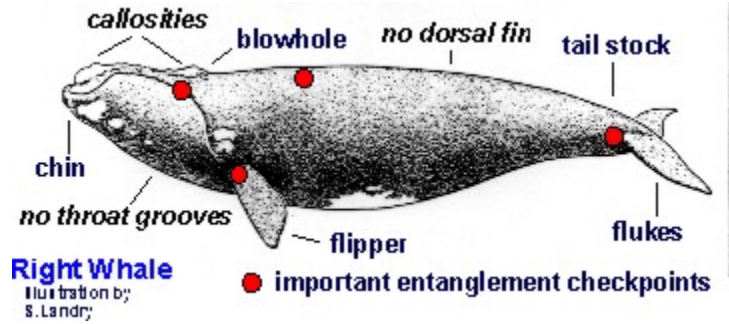
Spotting Entangled Whales

Spotting entangled whales requires careful observation. Whenever a whale is sighted, look for buoys or lines moving or unusually clumped near the whale or trailing some distance behind. Gear may also be seen wrapped over the whale's back, flippers, tail stock, or through the mouth.

Photographs or video of an entanglement are extremely valuable, especially when they document areas where the gear is entangled on the whale.

Be sure to stay well clear of an entangled whale to avoid spooking it or running over any trailing gear.

The right whale illustration below shows both important entanglement checkpoints and the primary body features. Key right whale features are *italicized*



Identifying Dead Whale Species at Sea

Whale carcasses are typically seen floating belly up. Due to predation and weathering, carcasses may differ significantly from the pictures below. Rely on described body structures for identification. If possible, closely examine the carcass for signs of injuries, such as gashes, bruises, or line marks.

Video or photographs are extremely valuable, especially close-ups of the areas around the tail stock, flukes, flippers, and any injuries.

Dead right whales

- ✓ Throat grooves absent (belly may have white patches or be completely black.)
- ✓ Flippers squarish in shape and, when the whale is belly-up, both may be up out of the water
- ✓ If floating on its side, note strongly arched mouth that contains long (6+ foot) baleen



Dead right whale (belly up; tail closest)
NEFSC/Sea Sampling



Dead right whale (floating on side; head to the right), note arched mouth and baleen (arrows).
DFO

Dead humpback whales

- ✓ Throat grooves present
- ✓ Flippers white and about 1/3 the length of the body with knobby bumps on front edge
- ✓ Trailing edge of tail flukes ragged-looking with large barnacles on tips
- ✓ Several grapefruit-sized knobby black bumps on chin and snout



Dead humpback whale (head to the left) NEFSC/PSB

Dead finback whales

- ✓ Throat grooves present (narrower and more numerous than on humpbacks)
- ✓ Flippers smooth, slender, and fairly short
- ✓ Tail flukes have smooth trailing edges and taper to narrow pointy tips
- ✓ Chin smooth and relatively slender



Dead finback whale (head to the right) NEFSC/PSB

Dead minke whales are physically similar to finbacks but are smaller (less than 30 feet long), and their throat grooves do not extend as far aft.

A good reference for identifying other species is: *Guide to Marine Mammals & Turtles of the U.S. Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico* (c) 1999. Rhode Island Sea Grant. To order, call 401-874-6842

(space below provided for sighting notes)

Date/Time: **Location (lat/long):**

Notes: