



LOOK UP to see the North Atlantic right whale skeleton.

North Atlantic right whale *Eubalaena glacialis*

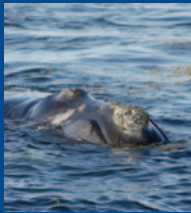
They look like fish, but whales are actually mammals, just like dogs, seals and people.

Whales evolved from land animals millions of years ago. Over time, their hind limbs disappeared, and their front limbs evolved into flippers.

Check it out! How does the whale's front flipper compare to your hand?

The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered large whales in the world.

Historical whalers believed right whales were the “right whales” to kill because they move slowly, swim close to the coast, float after death and produce a lot of baleen and oil. Right whale hunting began to decline around 1730, and by the time it ended in the early 1900s there were barely any right whales left in the North Atlantic Ocean. Only about 350 right whales remain alive today.



Right whales can be identified by black and white markings on their heads (called callosities), scars, birthmarks and other features. The Aquarium maintains an ID catalog that includes photographs of these distinguishing features for every known North Atlantic right whale. Scientists use this catalog to track and study individual whales throughout their lives and monitor right whale population trends over time.



People stopped hunting right whales 100 years ago, but almost half of all right whale deaths are still caused by human activities.



Right whales can be hurt or killed by accidental collisions—ship strikes—with large ships or recreational boats. In 2003, the Aquarium helped relocate the major shipping lanes in the Bay of Fundy, an important right whale feeding area. This change directs ships around the whales, and should reduce the risk of ship strikes.

Commercial fishing gear is also dangerous for right whales. The whales can become tangled in the gear and may die from exhaustion, starvation or infection. The Aquarium is studying new fishing gear that should reduce this risk, such as ropes that are easier for whales to see and gear that breaks if a whale gets tangled.