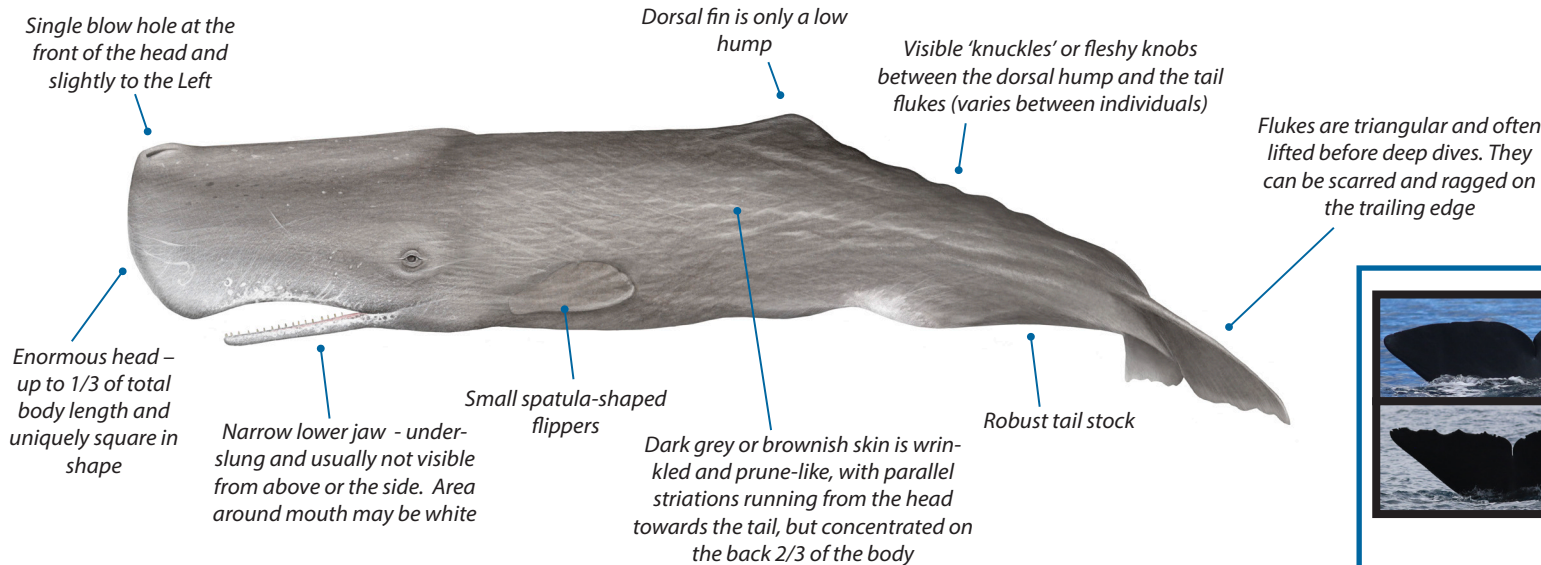


# Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

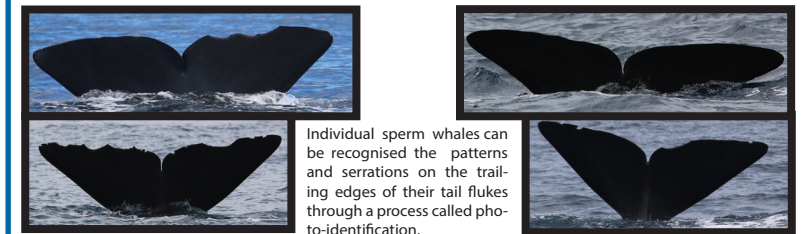
Distribution: Coastal areas of the North Pacific (see map below and full list of countries in the detailed species account online at: <https://www.handbook.iwc.int/en/species/sperm-whale>)

Adult length: Up to 18m (male)/11-12m (female)  
 Adult weight: up to 57,000kg (m)  
 Newborn: 3.5-4.5m /1,000kg







Threats: ship strikes, plastic ingestion, climate change  
 Habitat: offshore  
 Diet: squid

IUCN Conservation status: **Vulnerable**  
 Mediterranean sub-population **Endangered**



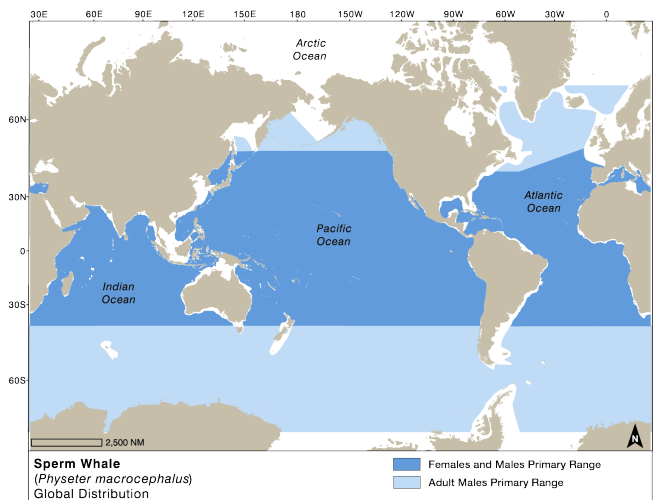
## Fun Facts

-  Sperm whales typically dive to roughly 800 meters and for 50 minutes in search of food.
-  Sperm whales' heads are filled with a waxy/oily substance called "spermacetti" (hence the common name).
-  The story of Moby Dick was based on hunting of sperm whales in the 1800's.
-  When under attack, some communities of sperm whales move into a marguerite formation with heads to the centre and tails

Sperm whales have a single, slit-like opening to their blowhole, positioned far forward and slightly to the left side of their heads. Photo courtesy of Chris Johnson



Sperm whale surfacing and dive pattern – notice the blow projecting forward and to the left



Sperm whale distribution. Adapted by Nina Lisowski from Würsig, B., Thewissen, J.G.M. and Kovacs, K.M. Editors (2018) "Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals", 3rd ed. Academic Press, Elsevier: San Diego, CA. Copyright Elsevier: <http://www.elsevier.com>

Sperm whales occur almost everywhere in deep open waters, or around islands and coastal areas with deep canyons or very narrow continental shelves. Only males tend to be observed closer to the poles beyond approximately 40° S or N. Social structure is based around stable matrilineal family groups. Widely roving males appear to briefly visit the females and young and then move on.