**Whale** (origin [Old English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English) *hwæl*) is the common name for various [marine mammals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_mammal) of the order [Cetacea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cetacea).[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale#cite_note-OED-0) The term *whale* sometimes refers to all cetaceans, but more often it excludes [dolphins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolphin) and [porpoises](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porpoise),[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale#cite_note-1) which belong to suborder *Odontoceti* ([toothed whales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toothed_whale)). This suborder also includes the [sperm whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sperm_whale), [killer whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killer_whale), [pilot whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilot_whale), and [beluga whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beluga_whale). The other Cetacean suborder *Mysticeti* ([baleen whales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baleen_whale)) are [filter feeders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filter_feeder) that eat small organisms caught by straining seawater through a comblike structure found in the mouth called [baleen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baleen). This suborder includes the [blue whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_whale), the [humpback whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpback_whale), the [bowhead whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bowhead_whale) and the[minke whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minke_whale). All Cetacea have forelimbs modified as fins, a tail with horizontal [flukes](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/fluke), and nasal openings (blowholes) on top of the head.

Whales range in size from the blue whale, the [largest animal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Largest_organism) known ever to have existed[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale#cite_note-2) at 30 m (98 ft) and 180 tonnes (180 long tons; 200 short tons), to various pygmy species, such as the [pygmy sperm whale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmy_sperm_whale) at 3.5 m (11 ft).

Whales collectively inhabit all the world's oceans and number in the millions, with annual population growth rate estimates for various species ranging from 3% to 13%.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale#cite_note-3) For centuries, whales have been hunted for meat and as a source of raw materials. By the middle of the 20th century, however, industrial whaling had left many species seriously endangered, leading to the end of whaling in all but a few countries.