

Identifying Whales seen in South Australian waters

Southern Right Whales migrate all the way from Antarctica to South Australia's coast to mate and give birth, to the delight of many locals and visitors, but further out to sea there is an incredible diversity of whales in South Australian waters.

There are over 80 species of whales in the world and 30 of them have been recorded in the waters in South Australia, from small Common dolphins (2m) to the largest animal ever to have lived, the Blue Whale (30m). Here are some of the more commonly seen species in South Australia and how to identify them.

Southern Right Whale

14 – 18 metres. Dark brown to black with white patches on belly; no dorsal fin; white skin callosities on head; V-shaped blow. A large, rotund whale. Endangered.

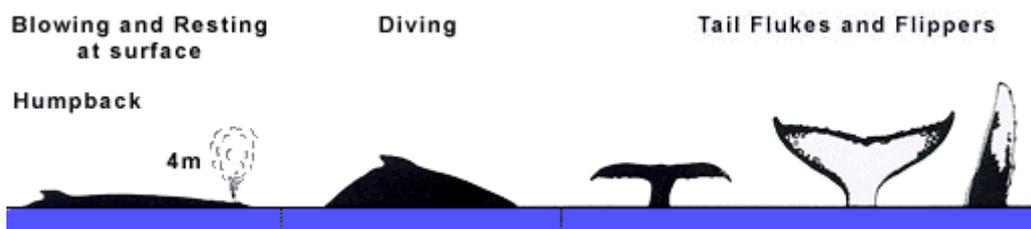
Behaviour: Southern Right whales are active at the surface often looking around with their eyes out of the water called spy hopping. They can also sometimes be seen waving their pectoral fins out of the water or tail flukes called sailing.



Humpback Whale

13 – 16 metres. Dark brown to black with white on flippers, flanks and belly; knobs on top of head and throat grooves; bushy blow; extremely long pectoral (side) fins. Vulnerable.

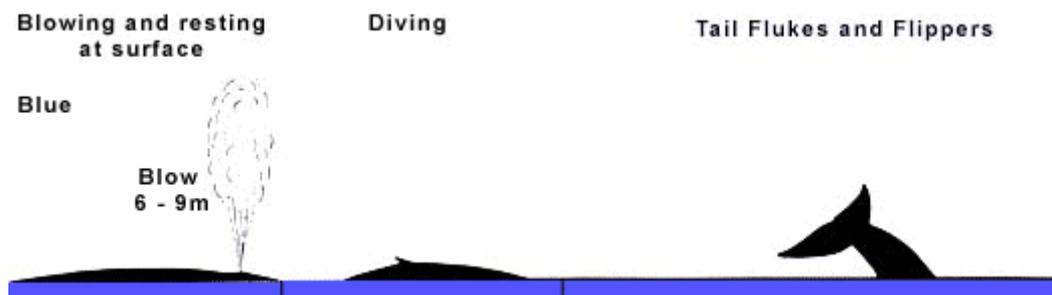
Behaviour: Humpbacks are known for their spectacular breaching; leaping out of the water, rolling with pectoral fins outstretched and crashing noisily back into the water. They are also famous for their complex songs and hunting for fish as a group using bubbles to trap schools of fish. This technique is sometimes called bubble-netting.



Blue Whale

25-30 metres. Blue-grey mottled with light grey spots. The Blue whale is the largest animal to have ever lived on earth, even bigger than any dinosaur, and they can live up to 80 years or more, weighing between 100 - 200 tonnes.

Behaviour: Blue whales are mainly solitary although occasionally travel in pairs or form loose scattered groups. When surfacing to breathe Blue Whales bring their shoulder and blow hole out of the water to a greater extent than other whales which helps experts identify them from other large baleen whale species.



Sperm Whale

12 – 18 metres. Black to brownish grey with white patches on mouth and belly; huge square head; heavily wrinkled skin; blow angles forward and to the left. Deep divers (up to 3km); feed on squid and fish. Classified as Insufficiently Known.

Behaviour: Sperm whales are not often active at the surface or close to land and therefore are less commonly seen. They do not have a set migration pattern but can be found anywhere in the open ocean. Adult males are solitary while females and young travel together with mothers looking after their young for 10 years.

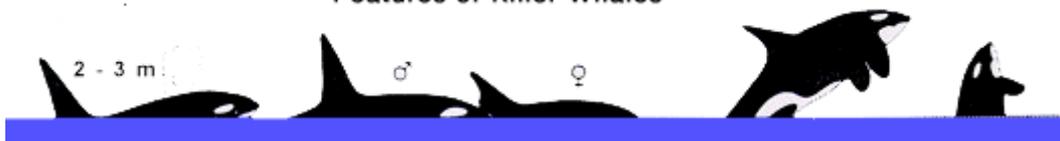


Orca (Killer Whale)

8 – 9 metres. Bold black and white patterns; tall, erect, triangular dorsal fin in males, more curved in females. Formidable predators eating fish, seals and even whales. Often hunt in pods. Classified as Insufficiently Known, but generally common and widespread.

Behaviour: Killer whales are frequently active at the surface, highly social and live in stable family groups. They display sophisticated group hunting techniques and vocalisations that are passed down through generations.

Features of Killer Whales



Common Dolphin

Grows up to 2.6 metres. Dark grey to dark brown, with yellow to buff colouring on front flanks and streaks of light grey on rear flanks and tail. Widespread in SA.

Behaviour: Common dolphins live in groups of hundreds or even thousands of dolphins and are very sociable, playful and active often displaying aerial acrobatics and breaching.