



Intelligent gentle giants, whales have inspired awe throughout the ages. Yet industrial shipping, plastic pollution and illegal hunting threaten our whales - risking a future in which they are just a memory.

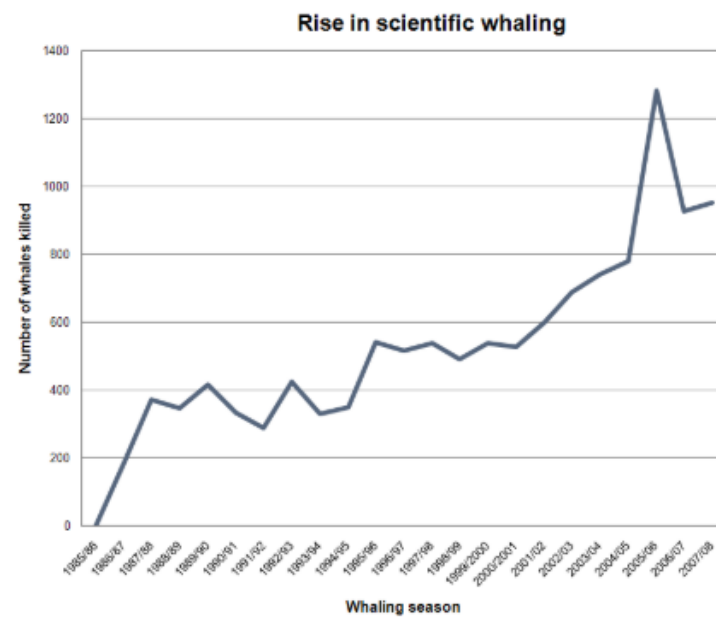
We need to create global sanctuaries that give our whales shelter, and take strong international action to protect them from whale hunting.



[Link to Website on Whales in Ecosystem](#)



Eighteenth-century engraving showing Dutch whalers hunting bowhead whales in the Arctic



A Brief History of Whaling

EARLY HUNTING
3000 BCE: Whaling was practiced by Inuit peoples and others in the North Atlantic and North Pacific oceans.

17TH CENTURY:
Smeerenburg ("Blubbervtown") was built on Spitsbergen after 1619. During its heyday in the 1630s and '40s, the settlement had 150 men servicing whalers that hunted the whales in the surrounding Arctic Ocean. Arctic bay whaling ended in the mid-1650s because of the onset of a miniature ice age that lasted for the rest of the 17th century.

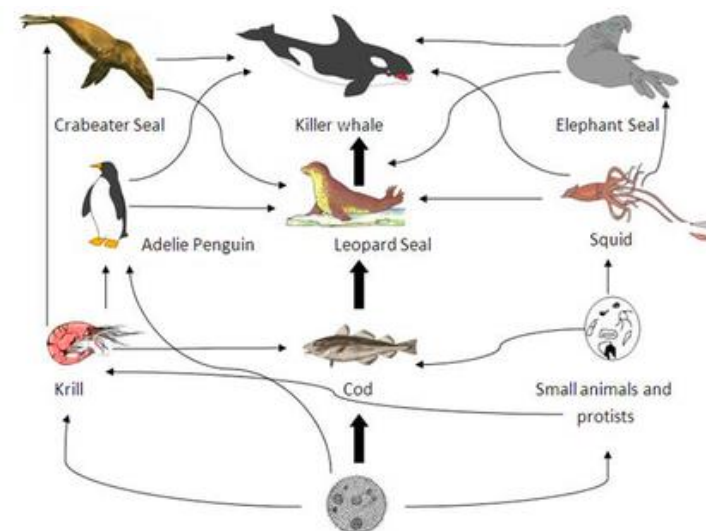
1850S:
The quarry of slow-moving 1850s-era vessels was sperm whales (*Physeter catodon*) and right whales (family Balaenidae, four species).

MODERN ERA
1950S TO 1980S:
Larger 1950s-era vessels allowed for greater range as well as the capability to process hunted whales at sea. Floating factories made it possible to process a 100-ton blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) in one hour.

THE PRESENT:
Minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata* and *B. bonaerensis*) are frequently listed as the quarry of Iceland, Norway, and Japan—the last remaining whaling countries—for food and research. Nearly 200 minke whales per year are harvested by aboriginal peoples in Greenland.

Modern vessels were equipped with helicopters and diesel engines, which allowed whalers to locate and overtake faster quarry.

Carcasses were winched up onto an open butchering deck via a slipway through the stern.



Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

In some parts of the world, whale products play an important role in the nutritional and cultural life of native peoples. Four IWC member countries conduct aboriginal subsistence hunts today: Denmark (Greenland), Russia (Chukotka), St Vincent and the Grenadines (Bequia) and the United States (Alaska and also potentially a resumption of hunts previously undertaken by the Makah Tribe of Washington State).

From the outset, the IWC recognised that indigenous or aboriginal subsistence whaling is not the same as commercial whaling. Aboriginal whaling does not seek to maximise catches or profit. It is categorised differently by the IWC and is not subject to the moratorium. The IWC recognises that its regulations have the potential to impact significantly on traditional cultures, and great care must be taken in discharging this responsibility.

In summary, the IWC objectives for management of aboriginal subsistence whaling are to ensure that hunted whale populations are maintained at (or brought back to) healthy levels, and to enable native people to hunt whales at levels that are appropriate to cultural and nutritional requirements in the long term.

More Big Whales in Ocean Could Mean More Fish, Scientists Find

New study reveals how scientists and fisheries managers underestimated the massive mammals.

BY [BRIAN CLARK HOWARD](#), NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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SCIENTISTS AND FISHERIES managers have long underestimated the valuable role large whales play in healthy ocean ecosystems, a new study suggests. And, scientists add, those commercial fishermen who complain that whales steal fish from their nets have it wrong.

An increase in the number of large whales—like blue, sperm, right, and gray—around the world could lead to a healthier ocean and more fish, a team of scientists report in a [review study published this month](#) in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

The underestimation occurred because "when oceanographic studies were started, large whales were largely absent from the ecosystem—because we had killed most of them," says the study's lead author, [Joe Roman](#), a biologist at the University of Vermont in Burlington.



Point Hope crew tows a bowhead to the ice edge, Alaska. Image: J.C. George, NSB-DWM