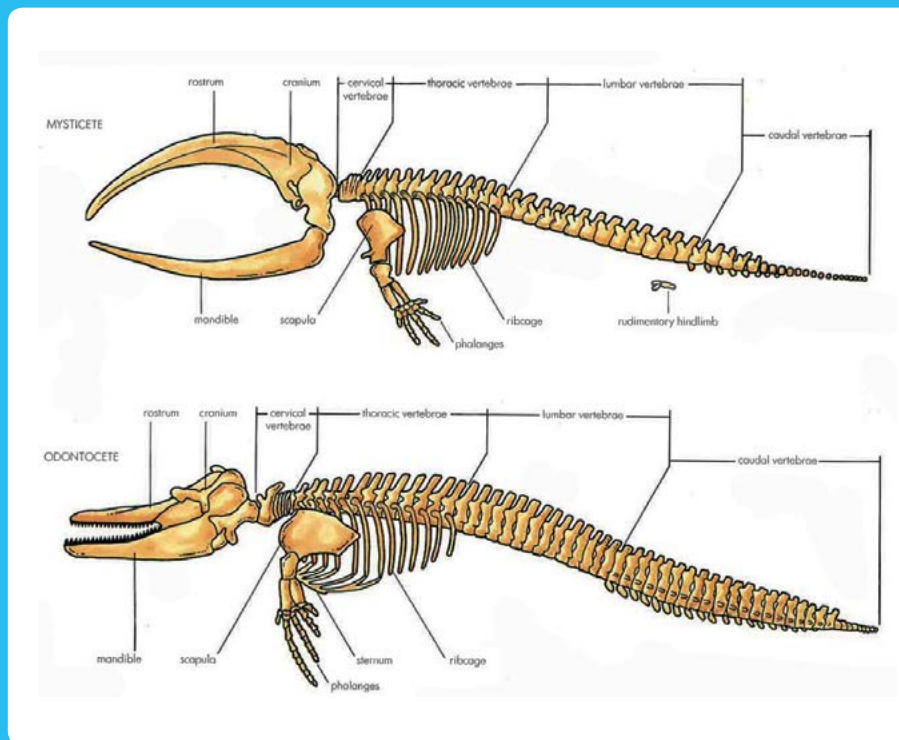


What are whales?

Whales, dolphins and porpoises all belong to the scientific order Cetacea. The word “cetacean” originates from the Greek word “ketos,” which means “sea monster.” The term “whale” is often used to describe all cetaceans.

Cetaceans are found in all of the Earth’s oceans as well as in some rivers and estuaries. There are approximately 80 different species. Cetaceans come in a wide range of sizes.

They are mammals like humans, which means they breathe air with lungs. This means a whale must come to the surface of the water at regular intervals to breathe. Whale nostrils, called “blowholes,” are located on top of the head. When a whale “surfaces” it exhales the air from its lungs. This is called “blowing.” They give birth to live young.



There are 10 species of baleen whales. Their name comes from the whales’ feeding structures—they have “baleen plates” instead of teeth. Baleen, also called “whalebone,” is made of keratin just like fingernails and hair. Each whale has many plates that hang down from its upper jaw, one after the other. The inner edge of each plate is frayed and forms a fibrous mat. The plates act like a sieve, straining out food from the water. Baleen whales are called “filter feeders.” They eat small schooling baitfish, herring and pollack, and they also eat very tiny organisms like plankton and krill. The baleen plates can catch krill a few centimetres long!

Toothed whales are hunters. They find, chase and then capture prey (fish, squid, crabs, starfish, and other ocean creatures) with their teeth. Once captured, the prey is swallowed whole. Toothed whales find their food using echolocation. It works as a navigation system and can detect objects, such as fish, in the water. The whale sends out signals, called “ultrasounds” from its nasal passage. The signals bounce or “echo” off objects, then return to the whale, giving a clear “sound-picture” of the objects’ size, shape and location.

For more interesting information on whales check out our website: aworldwithwhales.com whale-kids

SAVING THE WHALE MEANS SAVING ITS HISTORY

