



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*)

Description

Sei whales (pronounced “say” or “sigh”) are sleek and fast. They have a dark gray dorsal surface often covered with oval scars and a white belly. A single longitudinal ridge forms the midline on the top of the head which distinguishes it from the Bryde’s Whale, which has three ridges.

Habitat and Distribution

Sei whales occur worldwide from subtropical to subpolar waters. They may occur in an area unpredictably, sometime in large numbers, and then be absent for decades. Migration patterns are unknown.

Sounds

Sei whales produce low-frequency tonal calls often consisting of multiple parts as well as broadband sounds described as “growls” or “whooshes”. Sei whale vocalizations are not well understood.

Feeding

Sei whales forage on small fish, squid, krill, and other small zooplankton, especially copepods.

Threats

Current threats include collisions with vessels and entanglement in fishing gear.

Fun Fact

Sei whales are the only mysticete (baleen whale) that feeds by both gulping and skimming! They gulp feed on fish by taking in large quantities of prey in one mouthful (like a humpback), and they skim feed for copepods by swimming along with their mouth open and constantly filtering (like a right whale).



Family: Balaenopteridae
Population: ~ 80,000
Status: Endangered
Length: 40 — 50 feet
Weight: 20 — 30 tons