

Marine mammal identification cards

WHALES



- Report all marine mammal sightings to DOC via the online sighting form (www.doc.govt.nz/marinemammalsightings)
- Email photos of marine mammal sightings to marinemammals@doc.govt.nz

Thank you for your help!



24hr emergency hotline

Humpback whale/paikea



Photo: Nadine Bott



Photo: Nadine Bott



Photo: Nadine Bott



Photo: Nadine Bott

Humpback whale/paikea – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 11.5–16 m
- Newborn: 4–5 m

Dorsal fin:

- Small dorsal fin with distinctive hump at the front, located about 2/3 of the way back along the body

Blow:

- Two blowholes

Colouration:

- Blackish upper body, largely white underneath

Body:

- Extremely long flippers
- Knobbly protuberances on head, tip of lower jaw and leading edge of flippers
- Broad tail fluke with unique black and white pattern

Research: If possible take photographs of the dorsal fin and tail fluke, and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

**Keep your distance –
do not approach closer
than 50 m to whales**



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Sperm whale/parāoa



Photo: Whale Watch Kaikoura



Photo: Nadine Bott



Photo: Whale Watch Kaikoura



Photo: Nadine Bott

Sperm whale/parāoa – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 12–18 m
- Newborn: 3.5–4.5 m

Dorsal fin:

- A small low hump

Blow:

- Single slit-like blowhole, on the top left side of the snout

Colouration:

- Purplish-brown or dark grey in colour, with white underneath

Body:

- Large, square head that makes up around 1/3 of the body length
- Females smaller than males with a proportionately smaller head

Research: If possible take photographs of the tail fluke and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

New Zealand Government

Southern right whale/tohorā



Photo: Nadine Bott



Photo: Tui De Roy



Photo: Don Goodhue



Photo: Nadine Bott

Southern right whale/tohorā – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 11–18 m
- Newborn: 4.5–6 m

Dorsal fin:

- No dorsal fin

Blow:

- Two blowholes that form a V-shaped blow when exhaling

Colouration:

- Typically black in colour but can have irregular white patches

Body:

- Strongly arched mouth
- Head and lower jaw are covered with large, white, rough growths on the skin
- Flippers are large and paddle-shaped

Research: If possible take photographs of the growths on the head and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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Blue whale



Dorsal fin

Photo: Nadine Bott



Tail fluke

Photo: Gregory Smith (CC BY-SA 2.0)



Surface feeding

Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar



Blow (tail)

Photo: Ailie Suzuki

Blue whale – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 30 m
- Newborn: 7 m

Dorsal fin:

- Tiny dorsal fin set well back on the body

Blow:

- Two blowholes that form a tall blow when exhaling

Colouration:

- Grey-blue mottled colour

Body:

- Up to 30m in length
- Extremely long streamlined body, tapering towards the tail
- Flat, U-shaped head with a ridge running down the middle from the blowhole

Research: If possible take photographs of the back including dorsal fin (both sides if possible), and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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Orca/maki



Orca/maki – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 6–8 m
- Newborn: 2 m

Dorsal fin:

- **Male:** nearly 2 m tall
- **Female:** less than 1 m and more curved

Blow:

- Single blowhole

Colouration:

- Distinctive black and white markings

Body:

- Large body
- White patch above and behind the eye
- Grey/white saddle patch behind the dorsal fin

Research: If possible take photographs of the dorsal fin and saddle patch (area behind the dorsal fin), and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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False killer whale



False killer whale – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 4.5–6m
- Newborn: 1.75m

Dorsal fin:

- Rounded dolphin-like fin

Blow:

- Single blowhole

Colouration:

- Almost black in colour with slightly paler areas on the underside

Body:

- Narrow, pointed head
- Long slender body

Note: Sometimes mistaken for pilot whales – see included comparison card for more information.

Research: If possible take photographs of the dorsal fin, and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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Pilot whale/upokohue



Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar



Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar



Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar



Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar

Pilot whale/upokohue – identification and information

Length:

- Adult: 5–7 m
- Newborn: 1.8 m

Dorsal fin:

- Broad sloping fin with rounded tip

Blow:

- Single blowhole

Colouration:

- Largely dark gray with a light gray patch on the chest
- May have a white saddle patch behind the dorsal fin

Body:

- Large bulbous head
- Light gray to white streaks behind the eyes

Note: Sometimes mistaken for false killer whales – see included comparison card for more information.

Research: If possible take photographs of the dorsal fin and saddle patch (area behind the dorsal fin), and send them to DOC with your sighting form.

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False killer or pilot whale? Spot the difference



Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar

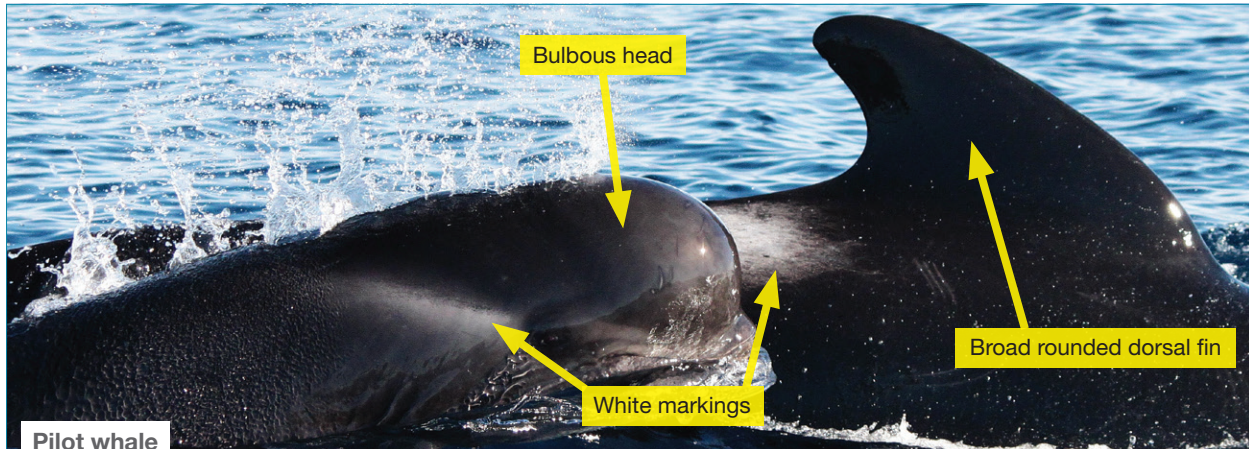


Photo: Jochen Zaeschmar