

FACT SHEET: Blue Whales

- Blue whales are the biggest animals that have ever lived. They are marine mammals, meaning that they feed their calves (young) milk, have lungs like us humans (so they need to come to the surface to breathe) and they give birth (unlike fish!), usually to one calf at a time. They spend their entire life in the ocean.
- When it is born, a calf weighs 3 tons (the weight of two cars) and measures 25 feet in length. They drink 100 gallons of their mother's milk everyday!
- Adults are much, much bigger: males can weigh 100 tons (ten school buses) and females, who are bigger, 150 tons (fifteen school buses) and measure up to 108 feet.
- Blue whales eat krill, which are small shrimp-like animals that one can find in areas where the ocean has a lot of nutrients, for instance in the Southern Ocean and in upwelling areas. They eat up to 4 tons (the weight of the biggest SUV) of krill in one day. This means that they have to stay in areas where there is plenty of food.
- There were about 350,000 blue whales at the beginning of the 20th century, but after that people started to hunt them in the Southern Seas they became almost extinct. Fortunately, they became protected in 1966 and there are now 8,000 to 14,000 blue whales. Scientists even say that the number of blue whales is increasing.
- On Oct. 20th, 2009, a 70-foot blue whale washed ashore in Northern California. The propeller of a big boat killed it (picture below). Blue whales are also seen off the San Diego coast during the winter months. They are going to the warm waters of Mexico to breed and give birth to their calves

