

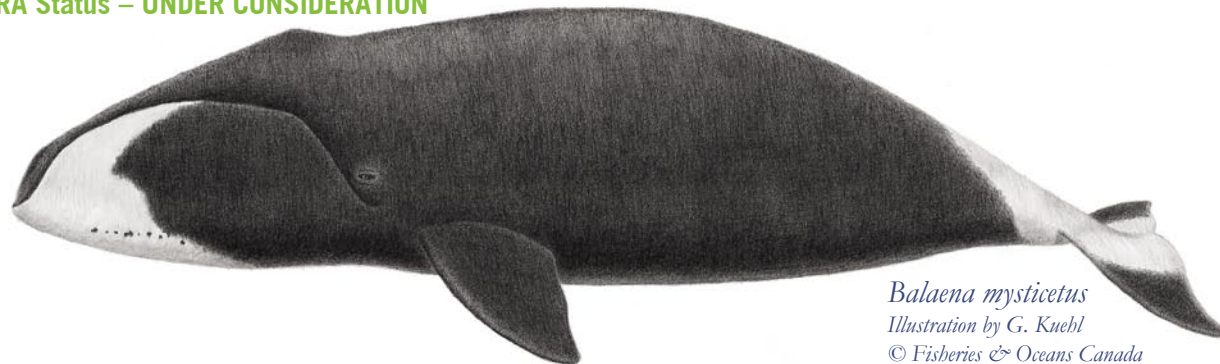
Aquatic Species at Risk



The Bowhead Whale (Davis Strait-Baffin Bay Population) *a Species at Risk in the North*

COSEWIC Status – THREATENED May 2005

SARA Status – UNDER CONSIDERATION



Balaena mysticetus
Illustration by G. Kuehl
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This species has been identified as Threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It is currently being considered for listing under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

Protection is afforded through the federal *Fisheries Act*. If listed under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), it will be afforded additional protection. Under the SARA, a recovery strategy must be developed for this species.

General Description

Bowhead Whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) are large baleen whales of the Balaenidae family. Other common names include the Greenland Whale, Greenland Right Whale and Polar Whale. In northern Aboriginal languages, it is known as *Arviq* or *Arvik* (Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun), *Agkbovik* (Inupiat), *Akkgvopik* (Yupik) and *Ittiv* (Chukchi). Bowhead Whales have the following characteristics:

- Barrel-shaped body and a very large head (about 30% of total body length)
- Upper jaw is bowed sharply upward; each side of upper jaw has on average 330 baleen plates up to 427 cm long
- The blubber layer is thick, from 5.5 cm on the chin to about 28 cm over the trunk reaching a maximum of 50 cm
- Flippers are small and paddle-shaped
- No dorsal fin or dorsal hump
- Flukes are pointed at the tip
- Calves are 4 to 4.5 m long at birth and brownish black in colour
- Adults are black in colour with white areas near the chin, eyelids, flipper insertions, ano-genital area, tail stock and flukes



Distribution

The Bowhead Whale has a nearly circumpolar distribution in the northern hemisphere and ranges from 54° to 85°N latitude. Physical barriers such as land and impassable ice are believed to have divided the world's bowheads into five populations, three of which occur in Canada: the Hudson Bay-Foxe Basin, Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Sea and Davis Strait-Baffin Bay populations. The extent of occurrence in Canadian waters of the Davis Strait-Baffin Bay population is roughly 774,450 km². Some animals of this population, including cows and calves, move westward through Lancaster Sound in late June and early July, remaining in the inlets and sounds of the High Arctic until September. Others, mainly adults and large adolescents, remain off the east coast of Baffin Island for the summer and fall. Wintering areas are off west Greenland and in eastern Hudson Strait.

Habitat and Life History

Bowhead Whales occur in marine waters within areas ranging from open water to thick, unconsolidated pack ice. They break through ice over 20 cm thick with the crown of the head to breathe, and can navigate and communicate under extensive ice fields using their sophisticated acoustic sense. They grow and develop slowly, reaching sexual maturity at about 25 years of age. Females grow faster than males and give birth approximately once every three years during the spring migration. Gestation lasts between 12 and 16 months. Longevity is estimated to be between 50 and 75 years, with some individuals possibly reaching over 100 years of age.

Diet

The Bowhead Whale feeds on crustacean zooplankton such as euphausiids and copepods. Epibenthic organisms (mysids and gammariid amphipods) are also consumed. It has been suggested that the annual variability in Bowhead Whale sightings is related to the abundance and distribution of zooplankton.

Threats

Commercial whaling was once the greatest threat to the Bowhead Whale and the main reason why the species is at risk in parts of its range. At present, the Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*) may pose the greatest threat, especially to the Davis Strait-Baffin Bay population. Climate change could reduce ice coverage, thereby increasing the vulnerability of Bowhead Whales to Killer Whale predation, as well as influencing prey availability.

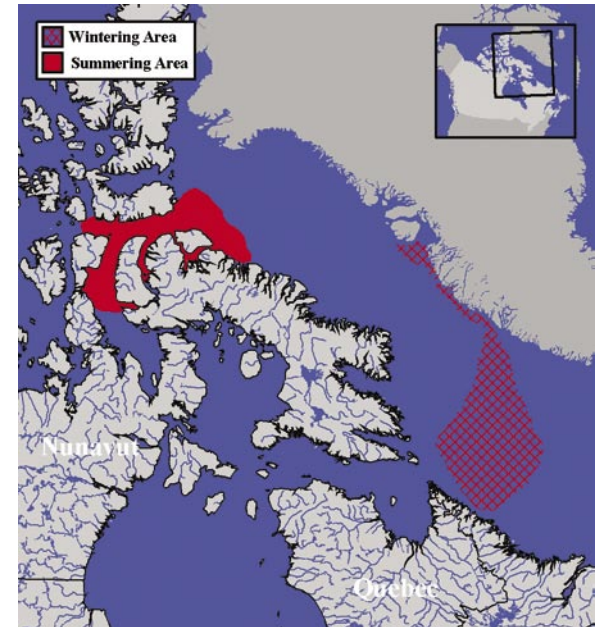
Similar Species

There are no similar species.

Text Sources: COSEWIC Status Report 2005.

For more information, visit the SARA Registry Website at www.SARAreistry.gc.ca and the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Website noted below.

BOWHEAD WHALE DISTRIBUTION - Davis Strait-Baffin Bay



Cette publication est également disponible en français.

DFO/2005-886

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Cat. No. Fs22-4/43-2005E-PDF ISBN 0-662-42315-1

www.aquaticspeciesatrisk.gc.ca

Section 32 (1) of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) states that “no person shall kill, harm, harass, capture or take an individual of a wildlife species that is listed as an extirpated species, an endangered species or a threatened species.”