### Description

**The second largest living animal, after the blue whale**

**Size:**
- **Sexual dimorphism:**
  - **Male:** 18-20 m
  - **Female:** 20-22 m
  - **Newborn:** 6-6.5 m - 3 tons

  In the Mediterranean, these values are smaller.

**Head:**
- Triangular when seen from above, narrow and pointed snout - 20-25% of body.
- A median ridge from the rostrum to the two blowholes.

**Body:**
- Shape: slender and spindle shaped.
- **Colouration:** dark grey on the back, sometimes brownish, white on the ventral side.
- A saddle-shaped chevron on the back in front of the dorsal fin.
- The shape of the dorsal fin and chevron are used in photo-identification.
- **Characteristics:** asymmetrical colouration on the head.
- The right jaw is light-coloured while the left is dark. Baleen plates, the inside of the mouth and the lower lip are also light-coloured on the right side.

**Dorsal fin:**
- Located in the back, it never exceeds 60 cm in height.

**Pectoral fins:**
- Rather short

**Tail:**
- Relatively large (about ¼ the body length), upper side dark like the back, underside white, rimmed in dark grey. Rarely visible.

**Blow:**
- Vertical, narrow and very visible
  - (4 - 5 m high), often audible at several hundred meters.
**DISTRIBUTION**

Cosmopolitan species, more frequent in cold-temperate and sub-polar waters. Makes large migrations between the cold and productive waters in summer and tropical waters in winter.

**MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEAS**

Pelagic species that lives mostly offshore, above abyssal plains, however it also visits bays and shallow waters. Extremely rare in the Adriatic Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Levant Sea and absent from the Black Sea. The Corso-Ligurian Basin and the Gulf du Lions are Mediterranean regions with the highest abundance (Notarbartolo di Sciara et al. 2003). A limited seasonal movement of fin whales exists in the North Atlantic to the Alboran Sea, with trips to the east recorded in early winter and trips to the west in early summer (Castellote et al. 2009).

**HABITAT AND ECOLOGY**

Although mainly found in deep waters (some dives have been reported up to 2,500 m) off the shelf, they also live at the shelf and slope.

**BEHAVIOUR**

Relatively sociable, can be observed alone or in small groups from 3-10 individuals. Inconspicuous, it almost never shows its flukes when it dives. It rarely spyhops, but often breaches, clearing the water completely, to re-enter on its side or belly and less often its back, with a resounding splash. In summer, it feeds in the cold, productive waters, and during winter it migrates to warmer waters to breed.

- **Longevity:** 60-75, up to 100 years
- **Swimming speed:** The fastest whale after the Sei whale 5 to 10 kts (9-18 km/h), but capable of reaching 20 kts (35 km/h).
- **Dives:** On average, 10 min. (but can stay down up to 30 min.), with dives reaching 2,500 m.

**REPRODUCTION**

- **Sexual maturity:** 6- 8 years
- **Breeding season:** Winter
- **Gestation:** 11- 12 months with births occurring every 2- 3 years at most.
- **Nursing:** 6- 8 months

**FOOD**

Small pelagic crustaceans ("Krill", mostly *Meganystiphanes norvegica* in the Mediterranean) and sometimes small pelagic fishes.

**THREATS**

The main threat to the fin whale in the Mediterranean appears to be collisions with ships (Cagnolaro & Notarbartolo di Sciara 1992, Panigada et al. 2006, Weinrich et al. 2006). Other potential threats include bycatch in drift nets (Podestà et Magnaghi 1989), contamination by organic chemicals (Fossi et al. 1992), unregulated whale watching activities (Airoldi et al. 1999) and global climate change (Gambaiani et al. 2009).