

Class: Mammalia Order: Cetacea Sub-order: Odontoceti Family: Physeteridae Genus: <i>Physeter</i>	IUCN global conservation status: Vulnerable ACCOBAMS/IUCN global conservation status: Threatened (Mediterranean)	
	Mediterranean: Regular	Black Sea: Absent

SPERM WHALE
Physeter macrocephalus (= ex-*P. catodon*) (Linnaeus, 1758)

English: Sperm whale



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♂ : about 16m ♀ : about 12m

- Name:**
- ◆ Scientific: From Greek *physeter* = *phusa* = wind, by extension, *phûseter* = blower, *makro* = large and *képhalé* = head
 - ◆ Common: From Basque *cachau* = large head

DESCRIPTION *The largest Odontocetes.*

Size: Major sexual dimorphism:

Male:	16-18 m - 30-45 tons
Female:	11-12 m - 10-20 tons
Newborn:	3.3-4.2 m - about 1 ton

Head: Squared and massive, about 1/4 to 1/3 of total body length (the largest head in the animal kingdom). Characteristic lower jaw: narrow and slim (0.5 x 3 m long), with 17-30 conical teeth, 10-20 cm long, on each side. Small eyes, barely visible. A single S-shaped blowhole, in front of the head to the left.

Contains a special wax, spermaceti, which used-be of great value for the industry, particularly as a lubricant for watches.

Body: Squat and massive. Skin wrinkled, particularly in the posterior 2/3 of the body. Colouration from dark grey to brown, margins of the mouth and throat are often white, and lighter patches of variable size and shape on the belly.

Dorsal fin: A ridge more or less marked, followed by 4-8 knobs decreasing in size towards the tail.

Tail: Triangular with a deep median notch. Sperm whales dive vertically with the head down and lift the tail out of water, which is useful for photo-identification.

Blow: Characteristic blow, powerful and bushy, 5-7 m high, inclined by 45° forward and to the left.

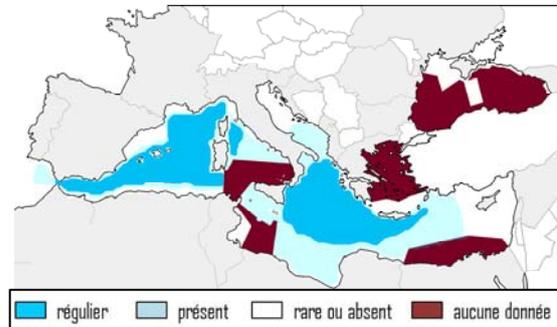


DISTRIBUTION

Cosmopolitan, found in all the world's oceans. They are migratory. Most sperm whales migrate towards high latitudes in spring and summer then return in temperate and tropical waters in autumn. Adult males migrate to more polar waters than females and young.

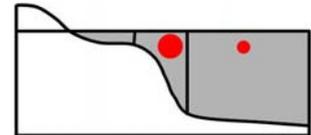
MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEAS

Widely distributed in the Mediterranean Sea, in the Gibraltar Strait and to the Levant basin. Common in the Algerian-Ligurian basin, Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas, South of Crete and all along the Aegean Arch, and the Aegean Sea. Rarer near the Sicily Channel and the Southern Adriatic Sea. Absent from the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea.



HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The preferred habitat of the sperm whale in the Mediterranean is essentially the deep waters of the continental slope where mesopelagic cephalopods, the preferred prey species, are the most abundant (Azzellino et al. 2008, Praca & Gannier 2008). It is also found in deeper offshore waters, but perhaps to a lesser degree (Praca & Gannier 2008).



BEHAVIOUR

A very social and cohesive species. Often found in large groups:

- Females and juveniles form social units.
- Young sexually mature males form bachelor schools.
- Older males tend to become solitary, re-joining social units only during the breeding season

The high social cohesion of the species is the cause of spectacular mass strandings.

Longevity:	70 years, perhaps more.
Swimming speed:	3-6 kts (5-10 km/h), but may reach 15 kts (20 km/h)
Dives:	Recordman of diving!! When hunting, sperm whales dive deeper than 500 m for 20-30 min (record: 2,250 - 3,000 m, for 90 min!)

REPRODUCTION

Sexual maturity:	Female: 7-13 years (size 8-9.5 m). Male: 18-21 years.
Breeding season:	Births occur between May and September in the Northern Hemisphere.
Gestation:	14-16 months (probably the longest of all cetaceans).
Nursing:	1 year, sometimes 2-3.5 years. Births occur at most every 3-6 years.

FOOD

Squids, crustaceans and fish. The giant squid, (genus *Architeuthis*), reaching nearly 20 m, is the most commonly known prey.

THREATS

Accidental captures in fishing gear, entanglement in driftnets, intense maritime traffic, collisions with large ships (Stephanis et al 2003, 2005) and underwater noise (Notarbartolo di Sciara and Gordon 1997, Frantzis et al. 2003).