**Name:**
♂: From Latin globus = round and from Greek kephalé = head, and melas = black
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**Scientific:**
Globicephala melas (Traill, 1809)

**Description**

**Size:**
- Male: 5.5-6.2 m (7.2 m in the North Pacific), 1.5-3.5 tons
- Female: 4.5-5.5 m – 1-2.5 tons
- Newborn: 1.7-1.8 m - 70-80 kg

**Head:**
- Large and round.
- Rounded, globous melon, increasingly so with age. Diminutive snout.
- 8 to 12 pairs of conical teeth about 5 cm long in both upper and lower jaws.

**Body:**
- Long and relatively slim, thicker anteriorly.
- Colouration: black and may be slightly brownish with a white anchor-shaped spot under the throat and belly. In some populations of the Southern Hemisphere, a more discreet saddle-shaped pattern is found behind the dorsal fin.
- Calves are grey.

**Dorsal fin:**
- Low and with a wide base (about twice its height), thick and relatively rounded, located mid-body. In old and larger males, dorsal fin is located anteriorly.
- Allows the easy identification of the species.

**Pectoral fins:**
- Very long and slender, curving posteriorly.

**Tail:**
- Marked median notch, thick keel.

**Blow:**
- At times visible in calm weather. Powerful, may exceed 1 m in height.
**Distribution**

Present in all cold and temperate seas of the North Atlantic and of the Southern Hemisphere.

**Mediterranean and Black Seas**

In the Mediterranean, the species is relatively common in the western basin, in the Alboran Sea or near the Balearic Islands, and becomes rarer towards the east. Its presence in the east of Italy is extremely rare (Marchessaux & Duguy 1978, Frantzis et al. 2003). A small group was seen in the Adriatic Sea off the coast of Cattolica (Italy) in May 2010 (M. Affronte, in litt.). A floating carcass of a potential black pilot whale was reported in the Gulf of Taranto (Centro Studi Cetacei, 1996). Absent from the Black Sea.

**Habitat and Ecology**


**Behaviour**

A highly gregarious species, often forming groups of hundreds and sometimes thousands of individuals. A group appears to be descendants from a single female. To avoid inbreeding, males tend to breed with females of different groups. Social cohesion is strong and may be the cause of spectacular mass strandings.

Although it rarely jumps, this animal is very active on the surface with fluke slaps, pectoral slaps, head erect out of the water ("spy-hopping"), etc. It is often observed in a linear formation, 5 to 15 individuals in front, swimming slowly or surfing on the waves.

These curious animals are often observed over a long period near a boat. They are frequently observed with other species (bottlenose dolphins, sperm whales and common dolphins).

**Longevity:** 40-50 years in males and 60-70 in females.

**Swimming speed:** 2-4 kts (4-7 km/h), but may reach 15-25 kts (45 km/h) over short distances.

**Dives:** Generally, only for a few minutes between 30 m and 60 m, but may dive to over 800 m.

**Reproduction**

**Sexual maturity:** 4-5 years but the first reproduction does not take place before, for females: 5-10 years and for males: 12-18 years

**Breeding season:** In the Mediterranean, mating occurs in summer and autumn. Births are from March to October.

**Gestation:** 15-16 months

**Nursing:** 1.5-2 years, occasionally much longer.

**Food**

Pelagic cephalopods (squid), occasionally fish.

**Threats**

Because of their oceanic habits and their teuthophages diets, finned pilot whales in the Mediterranean are less affected by human activities than other coastal cetaceans. Threats are bycatch in pelagic drift nets (Northridge 1984, Notarbartolo di Sciara 1990), collisions (Pesante et al. 2002), pollution, morbillivirus infections (Fernandez et al. 2008) and anthropogenic noise (Rendel and Gordon 1999).