



# Visit The Wildside!

## Blue Whales

Blue whales are the largest animals ever known to live on this Earth. They live in all the world's oceans occasionally swimming in small groups but usually alone or in pairs. Often, they spend summers feeding in polar waters and then make a lengthy migration towards the Equator as winter arrives. They can cruise the ocean at more than five miles an hour but when agitated, they can reach more than twenty miles per hour!

These warm blooded mammals are very large! They are up to 100 feet long and weigh upwards of 180 tons. Their tongues can weigh as much as an elephant and their hearts as much as an automobile.

Blue whales skin coloring looks blue underwater, but on the surface, their coloring is more a blue-gray. Their underbellies have a yellowish hue from the microorganisms that live in their skin. The blue whale has a broad, flat head and a long body that ends in wide, triangular flukes. The whale's nostrils are called blowholes. Most whales have two of them located on top of their head. They breathe voluntarily - humans breathe involuntarily. This means that whales choose when to breathe. They cannot breathe under water because they have lungs like we do. They surface the ocean every few minutes to blow out water and air through their blowhole and take in a breath of fresh air. Whales also have blubber or fat which



keeps them warm in colder water.

A Blue Whale's diet is mainly composed of tiny shrimplike animals called krill. During certain times of a year, an adult can consume about 4 tons of krill per day. Blue whales are baleen whales. This means they have fringed plates of fingernail-like material, called baleen, attached to their upper jaws. When they feed, they gulp a huge mouthful of water, expanding the pleated skin on their throat and belly to take it in. Then the whale's tongue forces the water out through the thin, overlapping baleen plates. Thousands of krill are left behind and then swallowed. The water blows out their blowhole!

Blue whales are among the loudest animals on earth. They emit a series of pulses, groans and moans and it has been thought they can hear each other up to 1000 miles away!

When a baby calf is born, it weighs up to three tons and stretches to 25 feet long. It drinks nothing but mother's milk and gains about 200 pounds every day during their first six months!

As well as being the largest, the blue whale is one of the Earth's longest lived animals. The average lifespan is estimated at around 80 to 90 years old.

Between 10,000 and 25,000 blue whales are believed to swim the world's oceans. Aggressive hunting in the past had drove them to the brink of extinction. Blue Whales are under protection with the 1966 International Whaling Commission. They are currently classified as endangered on the World Conservation Union Red List.

