



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Tourism and Business Development College of Business,
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at
<http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/>

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program
<https://www.GORPguide.org>

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<https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide>

Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/gray-whale-eschrichtius-robustus/

By colliiek2

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Mother and calf surfacing for air. www.unsplash.com

Approximately 18,000 Gray Whales migrate twice each year just off the Oregon coast. Approximately 200 Gray Whales hang out year around near the central coast area. This makes them relatively easy to see.

Gray Whales are the most common of the 10 species of whales, dolphins, and porpoises that reside on the Oregon Coast. The Whale Watch Center in Depoe Bay reports seeing as many as 50 whales per day during December – January and again in the spring.

Where are they going?

The whales migrate south to breeding grounds in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico and north to Alaska shortly thereafter. Gray Whales make the longest annual migration of any mammal on earth of over 12,000 miles round trip.

How to spot a Gray Whale

One might think that spotting something so common and the size of a city bus should be easy. Gray Whales can weigh up to 80,000 pounds and reach 50 feet in length. That doesn't mean that they are easy to see all of the time. The mottled gray color, along with barnacles and whale lice, can make even the large adults swimming just a few miles from shore a challenge.

The easiest way to find them is to grab binoculars and find a high view point on a calm morning. Look for a bushy puff of white on the water. This spout or blow, which should be visible for about five seconds on a calm day. The blow can rise up to 15-feet and occurs as the whale exhales warm, moist air when surfacing.

Finding spouts

Gray Whales typically blow three to five spouts in a row, about 30 to 50 seconds apart as they swim. You may need to move the lens slightly to account for them swimming. Move left (or south) in the winter, and right (or north) in the spring.

Keep watching and you may see the whale use its tail to dive to the sea bottom for three to six seconds. It will then return to the surface to repeat the spouting breathing rhythm.

What is the whale diving for?

Grays fill their mouths with mud from the sea bottom. The mud is strained through a filter-feeding system, called baleen, on the upper jaw of their mouths. Baleen is keratin which is the same substance as human fingernails and hair.

Water and mud is pushed out through the baleen trapping krill and small fish. Many whales have baleen, but not all use it in the same manner. Grays only use only one side of the baleen which is unique in the whale community.

There are several places to learn more about the Gray Whale. Here are a few ideas:

—Visit a *Visitors' Guide to Whale Watching on the Oregon Coast*

(<https://www.coastexplorermagazine.com/display.php?url=a-guide-to-whale-watching-on-the-oregon-coast>)

—Visit the ***Whale Watching Spoken Here*** program (<https://orwhalewatch.org/>) that has information on best places to see whales, volunteer training, and more.

—Visit Oregon State Parks, ***Whale Watching Center*** in Depoe Bay, (https://oregonstateparks.org/index.cfm?do=parkPage.dsp_parkPage&parkId=183) which has videos of spouting whales, and more.

REFERENCE:

—Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/whales-dolphins-and-porpoises>)

- Shoreline Education for Awareness, Inc. Friends of the Southern Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuges (<https://sea-edu.org/2019/11/25/whale-migration-is-upon-us/>)
- Wikipedia, Baleen (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baleen>)