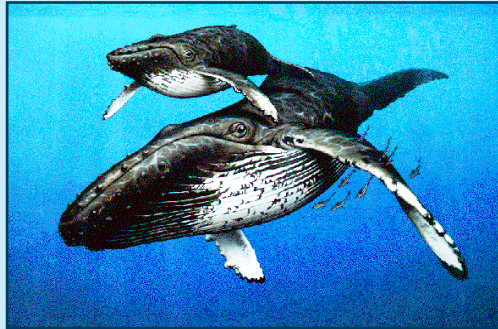


GENTLE GIANTS OF THE DEEP

HUMPBACK WHALES

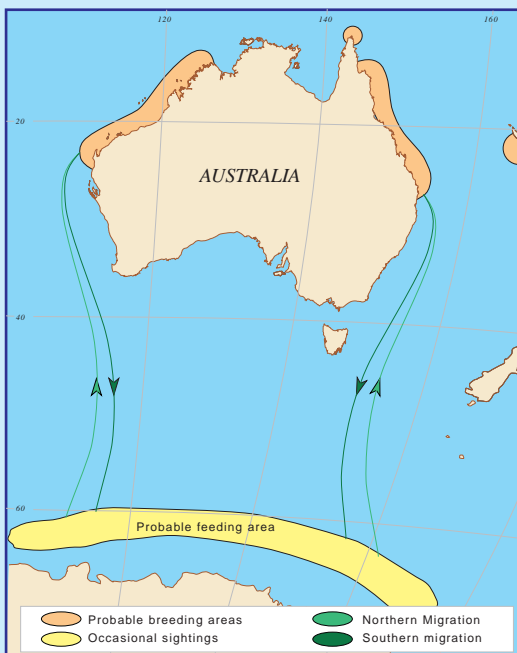
HUMPBACK WHALES (*Megaptera novaengliae*)



Humpback whales are one of the largest baleen whale species, growing to an average length of 14-15 m and weighing up to 35-40 tonnes. Humpbacks get their names from the way they round out or 'hump' their backs before they dive.

These whales may occasionally be observed in the winter months in the waters around the Lowendal and Montebello Islands. Humpback whales follow long established migration routes up the Western Australian coast from their Antarctic feeding groups to their tropical breeding groups in the Kimberley region.

Humpback whales are often found in loose social groups of 3 to 4 although they may congregate in much larger numbers. One of the most spectacular whales to watch, humpbacks are often found 'breaching' - launching themselves partially out of the water before crashing down in a fountain of spray. Other behaviour exhibited includes waving a flipper or tail out of the water and swimming along on their sides or back.



The humpback whale migration in winter

Humpback whales communicate in distinctive squeaks and whines, commonly referred to as 'singing'. Distinctive patterns of singing have been observed between particular family groups of whales, especially during the breeding season.

Humpback whales sometimes concentrate large quantities of food in a net of bubbles then consume them in one gulp.

Female humpback whales give birth to a single calf after a gestation period of 11 to 12 months, nurturing the juvenile until it is almost a year old and 8 m in length.

It has been estimated that there are less than 6,000 humpback whales left worldwide, of an original population of hundreds of thousands. These whales were nearly decimated by whaling activities in the early part of this century. However, they are now protected and the population numbers are increasing steadily.