

Location	Date & Time	Weather	Sea Condition	# of Whales in group	Direction of Travel

Orca



Notes:



To the Kwakwaka'wakw on the Northern tip of Vancouver Island they are the *Max'inux* (black fish). To scientists, they are *Orcinus Orca*, the largest member of the dolphin family and the uncontested top predator in all the earth's oceans. To whale watchers, they're Orca's or Killer Whales, streamlined animals with glossy black and white markings and distinctive dorsal fins that tower nearly 6 feet above the waves. The Season our Residential (Alert Bay) area begins mid-June to mid-October.

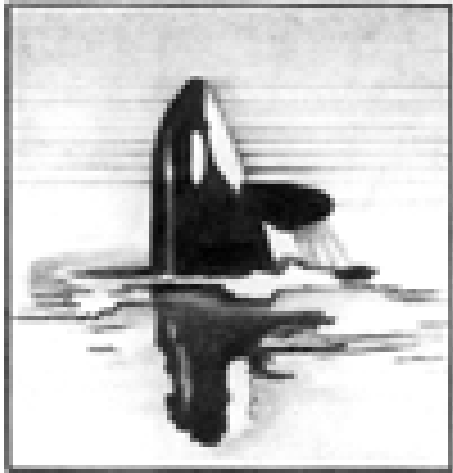


Our residential area for Orca's begins at Campbell River, half way down Vancouver Island and goes to South of Alaska. We have over 220 Residential Orca's in our area. Even though we are far South in the region a high percentage of the Orcas remain around Johnstone Strait because of Robson Bite, an Ecological Reserve that has been set aside for the Orca's. The Orcas like to rub their bellies on the smooth rocks on the bottom of this beach. You have to stay 400 M out of Robson Bite at all times.

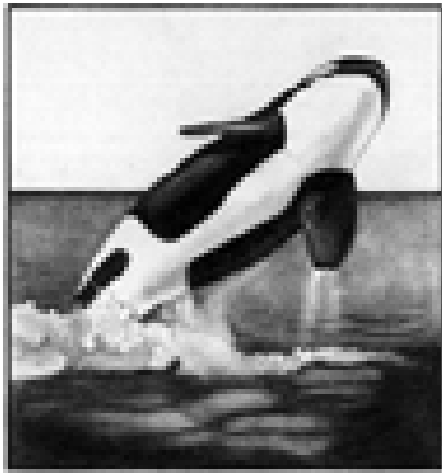
Orca Behavior

- Spyhopping** In a maneuver called *spyhopping*, an orca performs a photogenic tail stand, bringing its head entirely out of the water. This allows the keen-sighted whale to watch for boats, keep in visual contact with other whales, or scan the shoreline for seals.
- Slapping** Sporadically slapping its flukes or flippers against the surface of the water may be the orca's way of herding salmon and other fish. One theory is that the whales drive the fish to the point of exhaustion, then swoop in and devour their frazzled prey.
- Breaching** A breaching Orca gracefully leaps clear of the water like the star of a gigantic water ballet, then returns to the sea with a resounding splash. Like slapping, this behavior may serve to startle prey-or it may simply be the whale's idea of a rollicking good time.
- Lobtailing** Also called tail-swinging, *lobtailing* is often a antagonistic display directed at boats or other objects (in one instance a barking dog on shore) perceived by the whales as threats. Orca's can use their powerful flukes like a clubs to subdue sea lions and seals; therefore, this gesture is analogous to shaking one's fist. To whale watchers it is clear signal to back off and give the whales room.





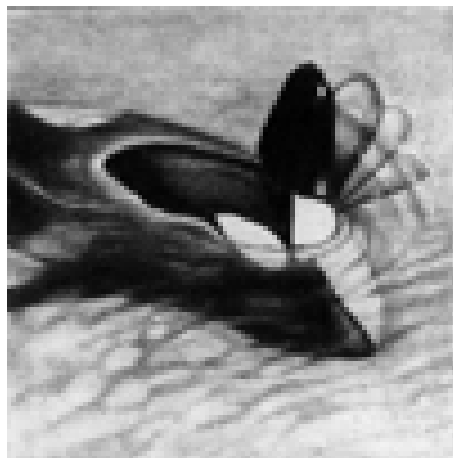
Spyhopping



Breaching



Lobtailing



Slapping

Orcas are abundant along the full length of British Columbia's mainland coast. However, the majority of port cities and drivable roads are found on either side of the Strait of Georgia, making this accessible body of water the best of whale watching (April to August). The Southern residential season begins a bit earlier. Whales can reliably be seen farther North in the Johnstone Strait and near the Queen Charlotte Islands mid-June to mid October but getting to these remote outposts requires more of a commitment on the part of the watcher.

Sea Smoke Whale Watching A true Eco-tour with 27 years experience viewing killer (orcas), humpback and minke whales and numerous other marine mammals including dolphins, porpoises, seals and sea lions; all while touring through the protected waters of Johnstone Strait & the Broughton Archipelago near Alert Bay and Alder Bay. Licensed skipper and deckhand and Transport Canada approved Passenger Vessel with weatherproof clothing provided for comfort. Daily departures are from the Government Dock in Alert Bay and from the Alder Bay Resort on Vancouver Island. Our 3-4 hour tour offers exceptional service & value. If you are looking for a unique and Eco-friendly experience, join us, our carbon footprint is very small. There is no other whale-watching tour like it on the BC coast!

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Orca-Watching from shore

Watching Orca's from shore is a bit like watching sea gulls as they glide past the porthole of a boat. Unless you happen to be at the right spot at the right time the animals may cruise by and you may not even see them.

Your chances of seeing *Orcinus Orca* are greatly improved if you confine your efforts to a few special locations and a few months of the year. Generally speaking, the whales tend to stay closer to shore during summer and fall-times when seas are calm and the hunting is best. Still, there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. Whales have been observed entering Coos, Depoe, Yaquina, Tilla mook and several other Oregon bays during April and May, presumably in pursuit of sea lion snacks. Eyewitnesses report chases that have taken the predators several miles up rivers to feed. Observation from shore can be very exciting.

Robson Bight Ecological Reserve is a special place set aside for the Orca's. It is an outcropping of land jutting into the Johnstone Strait in British Columbia. Here, between mid June-mid October, whale watchers have sighted over 250 of the province's resident Orca's. The whales come to Robson Bight to scrape their bellies, backs and flippers against the smooth black pebbles of the seafloor. No one really knows why. The Bight itself is off-limits to hikers, but other points along this craggy strait offer good viewing. There is approximately 220 resident Orca's in the North Vancouver Island area.

Your chances are best if you have the proper gear. A good pair of binoculars of high-powered spotter's scope easily and comfortably brings the whales into view. Bring warm clothes and rain gear to accommodate any sudden changes in weather and keep in mind the clear, sunny skies are not a requisite for good whale watching. In fact, many people feel that overcast days, with reduced surface glare, increase the chances of spotting Orca's.

Orca Society

The basic unit of Orca society is the pod, and extended family group of a many as 50 whales. Within the pod are several smaller units called *subpods*. These in turn are composed of even smaller units known as *maternal groups*. In all of these units, the central animals are the females.

Killer whale subpods feed, travel, and cavort together for their entire lives. By observing their interactions, scientists in the Pacific Northwest have been able to compile detailed family trees, tracing bloodlines within Orca pods back several generations. We now recognize three distinct pods in residing in Washington waters and another 14 pods in British Columbia. A complete census of Orca pods in Alaska has yet to be conducted.

Occasionally, two or more come together, forming what is commonly known as a *superpod*. Such gatherings often take place during summer and early fall and are possibly related to a seasonal abundance of food. Superpods may also serve a more important social function.

Orca calves are born singly, after a pregnancy that last roughly 17 months. The 7-foot-long newborn begins nursing within hours of its tail-first emergence from the womb. Nursing may continue for over a year, months after the mother has begun encouraging the youngster to accept solid food. Mothers and calves are especially close, seldom separated by more than a few body lengths.

By the end of the first year, the calf will have grown to about 10 and 1/2 ft. in length. Even at this size, though, the calf prefers to travel at its mother's side. Because many orcas give birth at four-to-six-year intervals, it may be a long time before the mother's attention will have to be shared. In fact, until a female grows old enough to care for her own family she will stay with her mother.

Precautions for boaters

Despite their appearance of aloofness toward humans at sea, Orca's are easily disturbed by boaters who encroach on their territory. As a result, the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States have passed laws and issued guidelines governing whale watching crafts. Boaters who disregard these guidelines are subject to fines, prison terms, or both. Among the common rules for Orca-watching are:

1. Boats should approach Orca's slowly, from the side and slightly to the rear, traveling parallel to and at the same speed as the slowest member of the pod.
2. After the whales have been approached, boats should position themselves no closer than 100 yards from the whales. Leave it to the Orca's to decrease the distance between them and you.
3. At no point should boat operators place their vessels between mothers and calves, nor should they perform any maneuver that interferes with the whales' normal behavior. Boats should break with a pod if any whale exhibits evasive, defensive, or aggressive behavior.



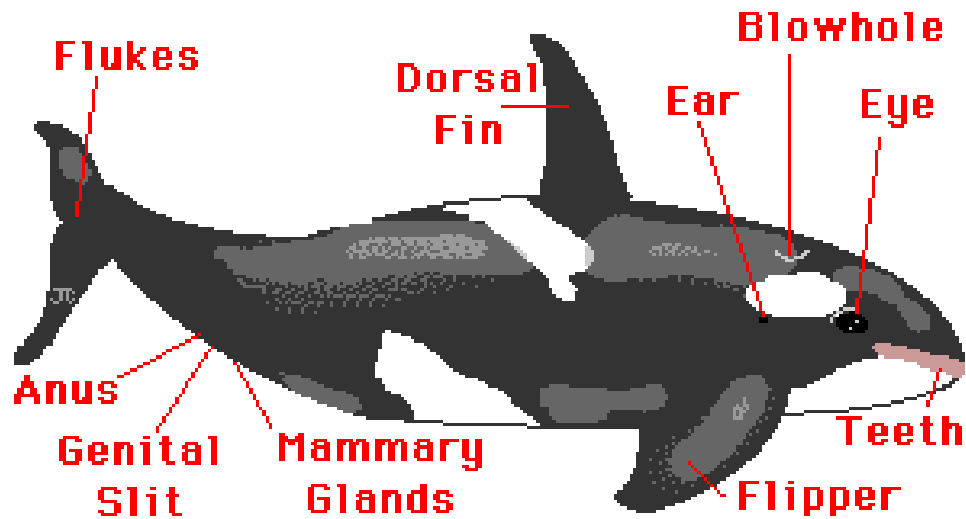
Watching Orca's by boat

You do not have to own a boat to watch Orca's up close: in fact, it's probably in the whale's best interests to discourage the owners of thousands of small crafts from forming whale watching flotillas every time a pod is discovered. More humane alternative is to share a boat.

Excursion boats operate out of various seaports, carrying amateur naturalists out for mornings or afternoons at sea. Few of these vessels cater specifically to Orca watchers; instead their captains often prefer to search for seabirds, seals, minke or gray whales, or other more seasonally predictable attractions. However, locating a pod of Orca's is possible and it's almost certain to prove as the highlight of any journey. When Orca pods are in the vicinity, most charter boat operators will adjust their courses to take full advantage to this wonderful show.

Alert Bay Charter excursions are offered by: Sea Smoke Whale Watching (see page 2).





Orca Facts

Lifespan-Estimated at 50-60 years for females; considerably shorter for males, who have a much higher mortality rate in the wild.

Size-Largest member of the dolphin family. Calves average 7 feet in length and weigh about 400 pounds at birth; adult females can reach lengths of 25-28 feet and weights of 7 tons; males can grow as large as 32 feet and 10-11 tons.

Fins and flukes-Full-grown males can be distinguished by their triangular dorsal (up to 6 feet in length); adult females have smaller (less than 3 feet-sickle shaped) dorsal fins. Flippers of adult males are long and broad, more pronounced than those of adult females. Fluke tips commonly dip downward of adult males.

Swimming and diving-Capable of setting an impressive pace of up to 7 knots and covering 96-161 km of ocean in a day. Breathing pattern usually consists of series of four or more short dives, 10-30 seconds apart, followed by a longer dive of 1-4 minutes. Transients may remain underwater up to 15 minutes at a time.

Vocalization-Researchers have been able to identify as many as 62 separate sounds produced by Orca's underwater. Frequently recorded are sonar like clicks, produced in bursts of up to several hundred staccato beats per second, with which the whales are able to navigate and locate prey. Other vocalization include squeaks, whistles, and shrill call sounds used specifically to communicate with other members of a pod.

Prey-Members of the Northwest resident Orca pods apparently favor salmon, herring, halibut, hake, and other fish species. Members of transient pods are thought to feed primarily on warm-blooded prey; remains of over 22 different species of mammals have been found in the stomachs of these whales.

Natural Enemies-Besides humans and other Orca's, none.

