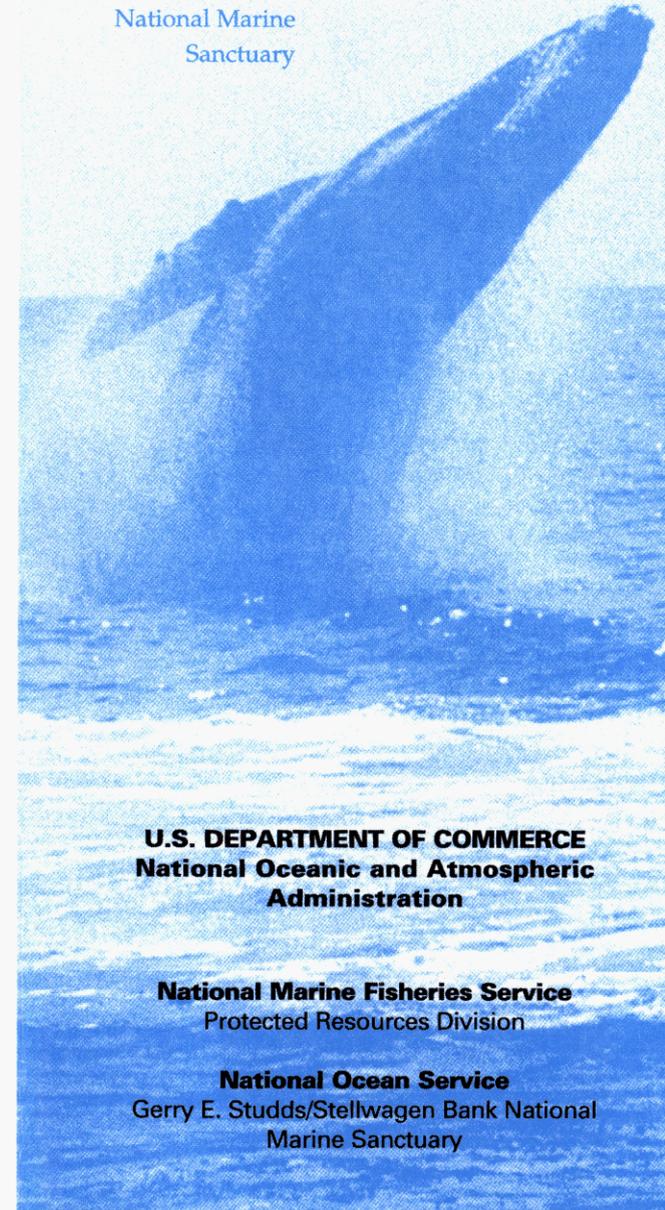


# Whalewatching Guidelines

NORTHEAST REGION

Including  
Stellwagen Bank  
National Marine  
Sanctuary



## Common Great Whales of the Northeast Region Including Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary

### Fin Whale

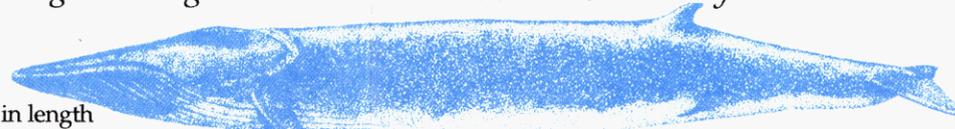
**Status:** endangered

**Size:** up to 80 feet in length

**Features:** fast-swimming; large, well-formed dorsal fin; does not raise flukes when it dives; countershading with dark color on left side of head and white along first third of the baleen and lower lip on right side; "chevron" or white streak that starts behind blow hole and continues along each side.

**Prey:** sand lance, herring, mackerel, other small fish, and krill.

**Range:** abundant on Stellwagen Bank, Jeffreys Ledge, off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Cape Ann, Cape Cod, and Long Island during spring-fall; moves south and/or offshore into deep water in winter; breeding and calving areas unknown.



### Humpback Whale

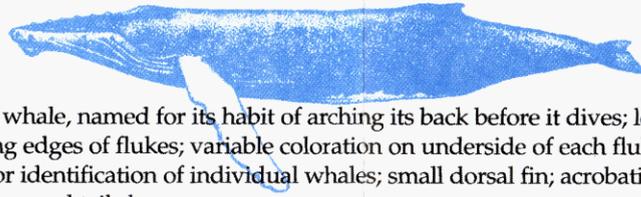
**Status:** endangered

**Size:** up to 55 feet

**Features:** stocky baleen whale, named for its habit of arching its back before it dives; long, white flippers; saw-toothed trailing edges of flukes; variable coloration on underside of each fluke (from all black to all white) used for identification of individual whales; small dorsal fin; acrobatic behaviors including breaches, flipper and tail slaps.

**Prey:** sand lance (particularly important on Stellwagen Bank), herring, mackerel, other small schooling fish, and krill. Uses bubble clouds or nets to corral or concentrate fish.

**Range:** abundant on Stellwagen Bank, Jeffreys Ledge, off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Cape Ann, and Cape Cod from spring-fall; juveniles seen off Virginia in winter; migrate to Caribbean Sea to breed and calve in winter.



### Northern Right Whale

**Status:** endangered

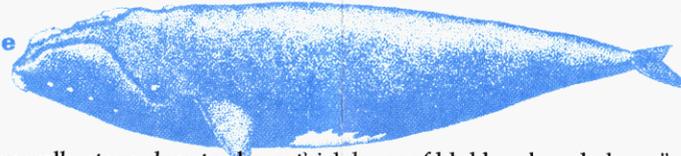
(less than 300)

**Size:** up to 60 feet

**Features:** slow-moving; generally stays close to shore; thick layer of blubber; long baleen; "callosities" on head and jaw used for individual identification; usually lifts smooth-edged triangular tail when diving.

**Prey:** skim feeds (surface and subsurface) on dense concentrations of small crustaceans, particularly copepods.

**Range:** Cape Cod Bay and occasionally Stellwagen Bank during late winter and early spring; Great South Channel in late spring; Bay of Fundy and Browns Bank during summer. Calving occurs off the coast of Georgia and Florida in the winter.



### Minke Whale

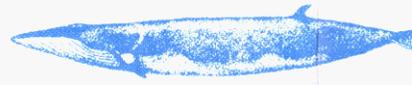
**Status:** abundant

**Size:** up to 30 feet

**Features:** smallest of the baleen whales; distinctive sickle-shaped dorsal fin; white bands on flippers; rarely lifts its tail to dive; displays no visible breath or spout.

**Prey:** similar to fin and humpback whales

**Range:** similar to finback



## Contact Numbers

### Whalewatching Information

For more information on the whalewatching guidelines or laws pertaining to marine mammals, call: NMFS, Protected Resources Division—978-281-9254

Gerry E. Studds/Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary—781-545-8026

### Right Whale Sighting

All sightings of a right whale should be called in to the alert network.

NMFS Sighting Advisory System —508-495-2264 or 978-585-8473 (Beeper)

### Entangled Whale

Any sighting of an entangled whale should be reported. Vessels should stand-by and keep the whale in sight until help arrives, or arrange for another vessel to maintain contact with the whale. Disentanglement HOTLINE—800-900-3622 or call on VHF CH-16 to the USCG

### Dead Whale

Any sighting of a dead whale should be reported. Marine Mammal Stranding Network—508-495-2090 or 978-585-7149 (Beeper)

### Potential Violations

Any reports of and activity that appears to be an intentional or negligent action leading to a collision or harassment incident should be reported. NOAA Enforcement HOTLINE —800-853-1964

National Marine Fisheries Service  
Northeast Region  
One Blackburn Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930-2298  
978-281-9254



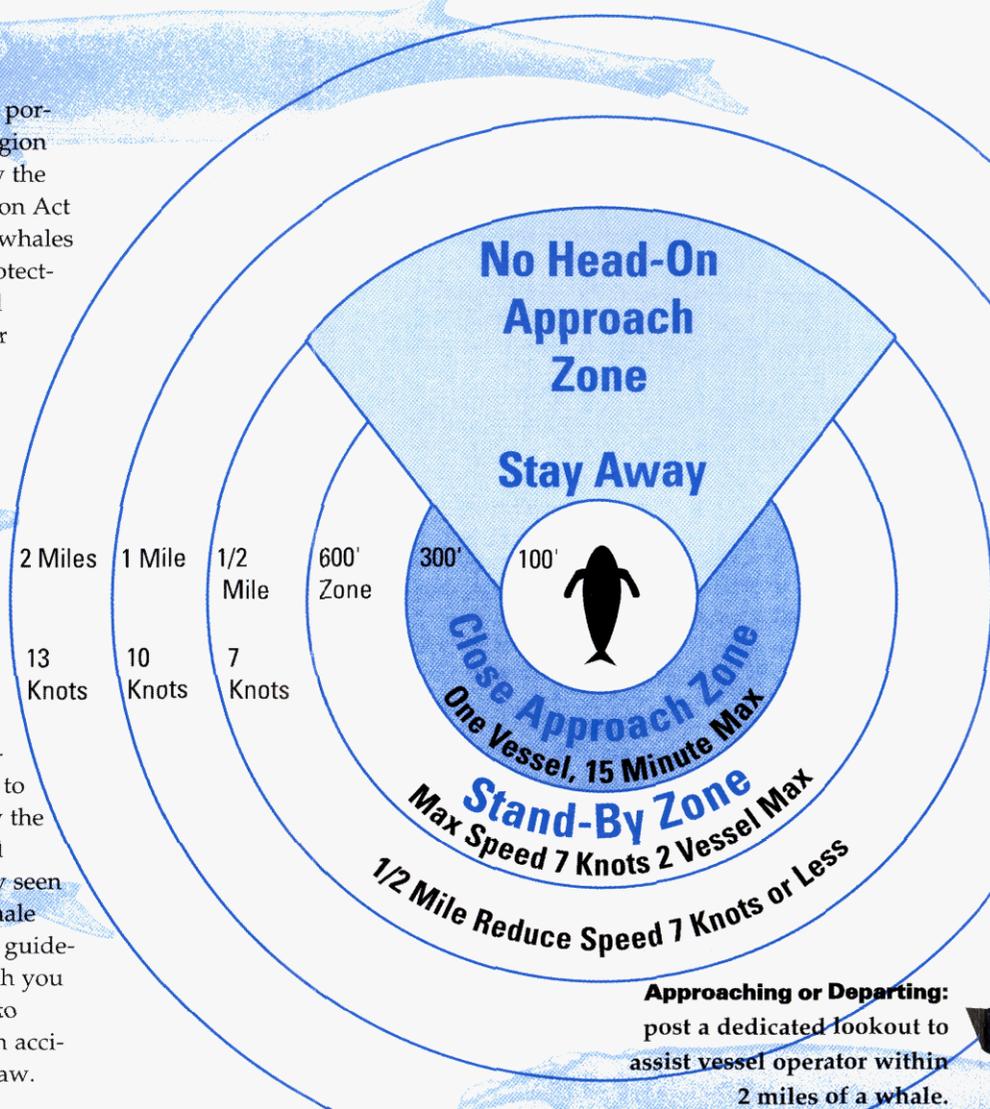
Gerry E. Studds/Stellwagen Bank  
National Marine Sanctuary  
175 Edward Foster Road  
Scituate, MA 02066  
781-545-8026



# Whale Watching Guidelines

All whales, dolphins and porpoises in the northeast region are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and most large whales in the area are further protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Under these Acts, it is illegal to "harass, hunt, capture or kill" any marine mammal. Prohibited conduct includes any "negligent or intentional act which results in the disturbing or molesting of marine mammals."

The following operational procedures are intended to avoid harassment and possible injury to large whales, particularly the finbacks, humpbacks and minke whales, commonly seen by vessels engaged in whale watching. Following the guidelines can help protect both you and the whale you wish to watch and keep you from accidentally violating federal law.



**PENALTIES:**  
A violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act or the Endangered Species Act may result in fines or civil penalties of up to \$10,000 or criminal penalties of up to \$20,000 plus IMPRISONMENT and/or SEIZURE OF VESSEL and other personal property.

**RIGHT WHALE REGULATIONS**  
The right whale is protected by separate State and Federal regulations that prohibit approach within 500 yards of this species. Any vessel finding itself within the 500 yard buffer zone created by a surfacing right whale must depart immediately at a safe slow speed. The only vessels allowed to remain within 500 yards of a right whale are vessels with appropriate research permits, commercial fishing vessels in the act of hauling back or towing gear, or any vessel given prior approval by NMFS to investigate a potential entanglement.

## When in Sight of Whales

- Two miles to one mile away:*
- Reduce speed to 13 knots.
  - Post a dedicated lookout to assist the vessel operator in monitoring the location of all marine mammals.
  - Avoid sudden changes in speed and direction.
  - Aircraft observe the FAA minimum altitude of 1,000 feet over water.
- One mile to one-half mile away:*
- Reduce speed to 10 knots.
- One-half mile or less:*
- Reduce speed to 7 knots.
  - Maneuver to avoid head-on approach.

## Close Approach Procedure

- 600 feet or closer:*
- Parallel the course and speed of moving whales up to the designated speed limit within that distance.
  - Do not attempt a head-on approach to whale.
  - Approach and leave stationary whales at no more than idle or "no wake" speed, **not to exceed 7 knots**.
  - Do not intentionally drift down on whales.
  - Vessels in multi-vessel approaches should maintain communication with each other (via channels 9, 13, or 16 for hailing) to coordinate viewing.
  - Take into account the presence of obstacles (vessels, structures, fishing gear, or the shoreline). All vessels in close approach must stay to the side or behind the whales so they do not box in the whales or cut off their path.

## Stand-by Zone

- 300 feet to 600 feet away:*
- Two vessel limit within the 300- to 600-foot Stand-by Zone at any one time.

## Close Approach Zone

- 100 feet to 300 feet away:*
- One vessel limit.
  - Other vessels stand off (up to two vessels in Stand-by Zone – others outside 600 feet)
  - If more than one vessel is within 600 feet, the vessel within 300 feet should limit its time to 15 minutes in close approach to whales.

## No Intentional Approach Within 100 Feet

- Do not approach within 100 feet of whales. If whales approach within 100 feet of your vessel, put engines in neutral and do not re-engage propulsion until whales are observed clear of harm's way from your vessel.

## Departure Procedures

- All vessels should leave the whales following the same speed and distance procedures described above.
- In order for vessels to be clear of whales before dark, vessels should cease whale watching and begin their return to port 15 minutes before sunset.