



North Atlantic Right Whale



Cape Cod Bay and Great South Channel were designated as critical habitat because they are important feeding areas. Southeast U.S. was designated as critical habitat because it is a calving area.

With as few as ~360 remaining, North Atlantic right whales are one of the most endangered whales in the world. The species recovery is dependent upon the protection of each remaining whale.

Year round, right whales can be found from Cape Cod to Nova Scotia – an area the whales use for feeding and mating. Each fall, pregnant females travel from this area to their only known – and likely only – calving area in the warm, calm coastal waters off the Southeast Atlantic Coast. Here they give birth and nurse their young. When spring arrives, mothers and their calves make the long journey back north.

The whales' migration route hugs the U.S. Atlantic coastline, leading them through nearshore waters laden with human activity, especially heavy vessel traffic. To make matters worse, right whales are dark in color, have no dorsal fin (making them difficult to see), and spend a considerable amount of time at or near the water's surface. They swim slowly, and most of the time, they seem oblivious to dangers around them.

It's Up To You!

Help Prevent Extinction of the North Atlantic Right Whale:

- Stay at least 500 yards away from right whales – it's Federal law!**
- Operate water craft at a slow, safe speed 10 knots or less in areas where right whales are known to occur.**
- Move away slowly if a right whale approaches you.**
- Always wear polarized sunglasses and stay alert in right whale habitat. Even though right whales are large in size, they are dark in color, and have no dorsal fin, making them EXTREMELY difficult to see!**
- Avoid boating during times of poor visibility particularly at night.**
- Know how to properly identify right whales and immediately report injured, entangled, or dead whale sightings to the U.S. Coast Guard radio VHF Ch. 16.**

Keep Your Distance – Lives Depend on it!

Approaching or remaining within 500 yards of a right whale is against federal law! Violations can result in civil or criminal penalties with fines up to \$100,000. This applies to operators of all types of watercraft (motorized and non-motorized) and aircraft, as well as swimmers and divers.

Calving season is the most vulnerable time in the entire life of a right whale; any disturbance could affect calving, nursing, or other behaviors critical to the survival of the species.

Steer Clear!

Notice To All watercraft and aircraft operators – Federal regulations mandate the following if within 500 yards of a right whale:

If underway, all watercraft must steer a course away from right whale(s) and immediately leave the area at a slow, safe speed.

All aircraft must take a course away from right whale(s) and immediately leave the area at a constant airspeed.

North Atlantic Right Whale

(*Eubalaena glacialis*)

Science, Service, Stewardship

Identification

- Baleen whales have mouthfulls of large flexible plates with frayed edges used to filter small animals from seawater.
- Adults are 45 to 50 feet in length and can weigh up to 55 tons.
- Black to dark-grey skin sometimes with white splotches on belly or “chin.”
- Large white bumps on top of the head called callosities.
- Paddle-shaped, short, stubby flippers.
- Deeply notched tail with smooth trailing edges.
- No dorsal fin on its back.
- V-shaped blow from blowhole when whale exhales, which is visible only when positioned directly in front or directly behind the whale.

Most of the time, right whales are difficult to spot and identify — a distant blow may be all you see.

Behavior

- May not move away from boat's path.
- Movement may be unpredictable.
- Mothers and calves travel together.
- Calves may be curious and approach vessels.
- Pregnant females don't eat during calving season; therefore, they need to conserve energy for giving birth, nursing, and migrating northward to feeding areas.
- Right whales spend a considerable amount of time at or near the water's surface, particularly mothers and calves.
- Resting right whales are oblivious to dangers around them.

Biology

- Females are larger than males.
- Sexually mature at around age 10.
- Produce one offspring every 3 to 5 years.
- Filter feeders using baleen plates.
- Feed on dense patches of zooplankton called copepods.
- Nurse for 10-12 months.
- Capable of living more than 100 years.

Did You Know...

- Approximately 1/3 of all known right whale mortalities are a result of vessel collisions or entanglement in fixed fishing gear.
- Preventing the deaths of as few as two female right whales per year will increase the right whales population growth rate.
- NOAA estimates that a female has to give birth to four calves to replace herself in the population.
- Vessels as small as 43 feet are capable of killing juvenile and adult right whales; vessels as small as 34 feet are capable of killing calves.

For more information about right whales, visit rightwhalesouth.nmfs.noaa.gov



About NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office

We are dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, enforcement, and habitat conservation. NOAA Fisheries Service is a leading voice for commercial and recreational fisheries and continues to focus its efforts on sustaining our marine resources. Visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> for more information.