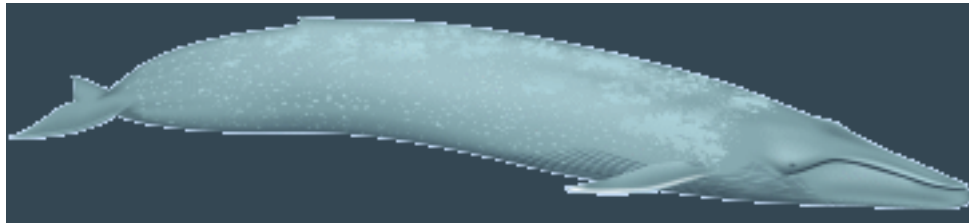


Blue Whales
Ranger Jim Serpa
2005

Since people are seeing lots of blue whales this summer, right off Doheny, let's explore a little about these incredible creatures.



First of all the blue whale is the largest of all the great whales. There are reports of whales reaching 120 feet but the official record as far as I have ever seen is 108 feet. Due to extensive hunting in the 1950's and 60's their numbers and sizes have dropped considerably. It is rare to see an individual over 85 or 90 feet today. Lets hope with continued protection in another 10 or 20 years we will start to see the really huge whales of the early part of the 20th century.

We used to think they lived to the ripe old age of 60 or so but many scientists are starting to question that number. Some think a better number might be 100 years or more!

One of the healthiest populations on earth can be found right off the California Coast. This summer they have decided to hang around Dana Point, instead of there usual summer haunts, the Channel Islands. We are not sure

why they are still around but we think that there must be food in the area. By the way these giants feed on tiny shrimp-like animals called krill. A single full-grown whale may consumer 4 tons of it daily! The babies can put on a staggering 200-pound a day due to the high fat content of mom's milk.

Just to get a reference on its tremendous size, it would take two humpbacks nose to nose to be as big as a blue whale. The blue's tongue is as large as an elephant and its heart is as big as a VW bug. The voice of the blue whale is the loudest on earth topping out at a decibel level above that of a jet engine. The strange thing is that it is at a range that the human ear cannot pick up. We have to use special equipment to hear it. They used that loud voice to communicate with other whales up to 1000 miles away. At least they used to. With all the noise in today's ocean many whale experts believe that that distance is reduced substantially.

These whales are truly incredible animals and hopefully we will see a few on our Catalina trip. Keep your fingers crossed.

**Jim Serpa
Doheny State Beach
Supervising Ranger
2005**