

# The Southern right whale



## Linnaeus says...

The Southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) is one of three species of right whale. It is closely related to the North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) and North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). Both species of Northern Right whale are on the brink of extinction.



## Stat attack

**Size:** Adults range from 11 to 18m

**Weight:** Adults weigh from 30 to 80 tonnes. A newborn weighs around 1 tonne (1,000kg) at birth.



## Jargon hunter

The name 'right' whale was coined by whalers because they were the 'right' whales to hunt. They were slow swimmers, could be hunted from rowboats, floated when killed and provided large amounts of valuable oil, meat and whalebone (baleen).



## X marks the spot

The best locations for seeing Southern right whales are around the Auckland and Campbell Islands south of New Zealand. If you are ever lucky enough to see a right whale be sure to report your sighting to DOC, who are trying to establish the size of the population in and around New Zealand.

In June 2007, a pod of four Southern right whales spent several weeks just a mere few hundred metres off the Otago coast. This provided many of us a great opportunity to view these magnificent creatures frolicking around and spouting water from vantage points along Dunedin's coast.

Our Southern right whales were once common visitors to Otago, including Otago Harbour where they came to calve. Whaling in the 1800s and early 1900s all but wiped them out as dozens of small whaling stations popped up along the coastline.

They have been a protected species since 1937 and populations have been showing significant signs of recovery. The total population is estimated to be around 7,500 and is growing by as much as 7% per year. Over 25,000 of these whales were killed by whalers during the peak whaling boom.

Southern right whales are baleen whales. These whales have hundreds of comb-like baleen plates hanging down from their upper jaws. The plates overlap and have stiff hairs, forming a sieve to filter food out of seawater. Baleen whales typically feed on small, abundant invertebrates such as krill.

Right whales are slow swimmers but are surprisingly acrobatic. They can be seen waving flippers above the surface, breaching (leaping out of the water and landing, with a big splash) and doing 'head-stands', waving their tails in the air for up to two minutes.



Surfacing near the Otago coast



Diving under the surface

