



**SPECIES FACT SHEET –**

# **Blainville's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*)**

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*Photo © Bernd Brederlau*

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## Measurements

### Length

Newborn: 2.0 – 2.5 m

Full grown: 4.1 – 4.8 m

### Weight

Newborn: c. 60 kg

Full grown: 700 – 1,100 kg

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## Identification

### *At Sea*

Long, spindle shaped body, small head with slight bulge in front of crescent shaped blowhole. Pronounced slender beak and highly arched rear half of lower jaw. Small dorsal fin about two-thirds from the snout tip.

### *On Land*

High arching in corner of mouth giving a prominent contour, which can be massive and wide in adult males, from which a single pair of triangular shaped teeth are visible from lower jaw, angled forward at about 45°. Single pair of shallow throat grooves. Crescent shaped blowhole with ends pointing forward.

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## Description

### *Head*

Blainville's beaked whales have a small head with a slight bulge and highly arched mouthline with a pair of deep grooves forming V-shape below. The lower mandible is sometimes white and a brownish hue may be seen on the head, shading to light grey on the edge of the upper lip and on the side of the lower jaw. Adult males have a single pair of flattened triangular teeth (12 x 8 cm) which extend up to 4 cm outside of mouth. In females these teeth are a lot smaller and hidden below the gum. The head is flattened directly in front of the blowhole leading to a long protruding beak, although in young animals it is much shorter and stubbier.

### *Body, Fin & Markings*

It is dark bluish grey or black on the back, lighter grey on the belly and commonly has large grey or pale oval or round blotches over the upper surface of the body. The body is spindle shaped which is typical of the genus. It has relatively small narrow flippers often tucked into flipper pockets and a triangular or slightly recurved wide-based dorsal fin situated two-thirds along back. The tail fluke is tapered and unnotched. There may also be linear scars and scratches at least in adult males, mainly between the dorsal fin and blowhole. Often it has a yellowish-orange sheen created by a film of diatoms over the head and front part of the body.

## Distribution

### ***Global Distribution***

It is one of the most widely distributed species of the genus *Mesoplodon*, recorded from tropical to warm temperate seas of all oceans. In the Atlantic, the Blainville's beaked whale is mostly recorded from the South-eastern United States, the Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean, with records ranging from Nova Scotia to South Brazil.

### ***European Waters***

In the eastern North Atlantic, the species has been recorded from France, Portugal, Spain and Madeira, but with most records coming from the Canaries where there are frequent sightings. Here, Blainville's beaked whales occur year-round, with re-sightings of identifiable individuals indicating site fidelity.

### ***UK & Ireland***

There has only been one record in the British Isles - an adult female stranded at Aberaeron, West Wales in July 1993.

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## Abundance

Unknown. Some records from recent sightings indicate that this species concentrates in certain areas and shows strong site fidelity. Population estimates are assumed to be low with relatively few calves, suggesting slow recruitment, although it is fairly common in most tropical seas.

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## Habitat

This species' habitat is poorly known, but it appears to favour continental slopes of 200-1,000 m depth and ocean basins of >700 m depth. It may also be seen near island archipelagos where great depths occur near shore.

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## Diet

Not well known. They are presumed to favour mesopelagic and benthopelagic squid and fish. Squid beaks found in the stomachs of three stranded individuals.

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## Behaviour

Most sightings have been of singles or pairs; however, pods of 3-7 were observed off Hawaii and 1-7 off the Canaries. Calves and juveniles have never been observed alone. Their social structure is presumed to be a harem with one adult male accompanied by 1 or more adult female-calf

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pairs. They may lie on the surface during calm weather. Scarring in males is indicative of male-male aggression. This species usually spends about two minutes on the surface between dives with deep foraging dives of 800-1,400 m lasting from 45- 60 mins. It only occasionally breaches.

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## Life History

Little is known. The minimum age of sexual maturity is presumed to be 9 years. Its life span is estimated to be longer than 21 years.

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## Conservation Threats

The greatest anthropogenic threat appears to be the whale's susceptibility to impacts from high-intensity mid-frequency (2-10 kHz) sounds, particularly naval sonar, which has led to mass strandings. Occasionally they are taken in small cetacean fisheries off Taiwan, Japan and Korea. Occasionally they become accidentally entangled in fishing gear (Sri Lanka, Seychelles and west coast Australia). Live strandings are sometimes held in captivity. They are legally protected in European, British and Irish waters.

**IUCN status:** Data Deficient.

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## References

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