

Orca Fact Sheet

New Zealand

Scientific Name:

Orcinus orca (these are usually written in 'italics')

- A scientific name is usually made of two parts, the Genus (always with a capital) and the species (always with a small letter). They may be in Latin, Greek or other languages.

Order: Cetacea

- Animals and plants are arranged in a ranking system called "taxonomy", which follows the order of: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.

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Ecotypes: Simply put, an 'ecotype' refers to a distinct population of any species of animal. Typically, ecotypes differ in body shape/size as well as behaviour. The number of orca ecotypes is not known, but there are at least 30 different types. Ecotypes do not typically interbreed.

- In New Zealand five different ecotypes have been confirmed (NZ Coastal, NZ Pelagic, Antarctic Type B, Antarctic Type C, sub-Antarctic Type D).

Social Structure: Matriarchal

- Orca typically live in a family group where an elder female (the 'matriarch') is the leader of the group. In some families the orca stay with their mothers their whole lives.

[Type here]

Where Orca Live: Every ocean in the world – from icy to tropical waters and in between

- In New Zealand they sometimes visit estuaries and rivers.

NZ Population: Fewer than 200

- The NZ Coastal population is classified as 'Nationally Critical' by the Department of Conservation.

Travel: On average orca travel between 50-100km/day at up to 30km/hr

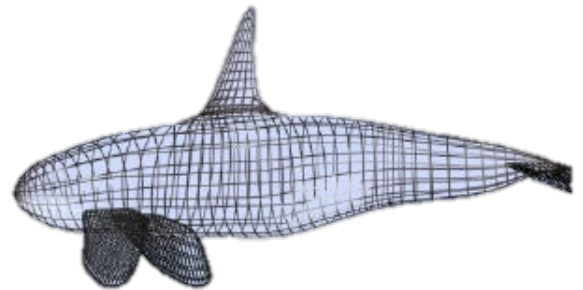
- An orca known as 'Ben' was documented travelling 193 km in a 24 hour period.

Vocalization: Orca make a range of calls from whistles, creaks and clicks to grunts and raspberries

- The NZ orca have a distinct kiwi accent.

Length: Female 4.5-8m. Male 5-9m

Weight: Female 3800-8000kg. Male 5600-9000kg



Food: An orca eats approximately 50-130 kg/day – depending on their age, size and activities. Orca forage for specific types of prey, depending on their ecotype and where they live.

- In NZ the orca feed predominantly rays, but they also take sharks, fish and cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises). They have not been confirmed to feed on pinnipeds (seals, sea lions and walrus) in NZ waters.

Lifespan: Females average 50 years, up to 100 years. Males average 29, up to 60 years

- In NZ the oldest known orca is a female called 'A1' – she was the first orca to be catalogued.

Threats: There are many threats to orca such as habitat loss, entanglement in fishing gear, boat strike, pollution (chemical, plastic and noise) as well as being taken for display in aquariums (in some locations).

- NZ has the highest rate of orca strandings in the world – this is linked to their hunting in shallow waters.

Other facts: Orca are mammals. All mammals have five characteristics; they (1) give birth to live babies, (2) drink milk, (3) breathe air, (4) are warm blooded and (5) they have hair. Orca have approximately 5 hairs on each side of their upper lips when they are born, but lose them after a few months.