



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

[www.mass.gov/nhesp](http://www.mass.gov/nhesp)

*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Sei Whale  
*Balaenoptera borealis***

State Status: **Endangered**  
Federal Status: **Endangered**

**DESCRIPTION:** Sei Whales grow to lengths of 12 to 18 m and weigh up to 45 tons. Their colors closely resemble the Fin Whale and the more tropical Bryde's Whale, with a long sleek body that is dark bluish-gray to black with paler coloration to white underneath. The dorsal fin is about 25 to 60 cm high, located roughly two-thirds of the way back along the body. Its tip has a sharp angle. To differentiate Sei Whales from Fin Whales, look for a uniform dark color on both sides of the lower jaw and on the baleen all the way around the mouth, a more sharply angled dorsal fin, and a generally smaller and sleeker body. Sei Whale baleen is dark in color, with grayish-white fine inner fringes. Sei Whales are about 4.5 m long at birth and reach 9 to 10 m by one year of age. Female Sei Whales are somewhat larger than males, which is true of baleen whales in general. In toothed whales, the males are larger.

**RANGE:** The Sei Whale can be found in all the world's oceans, excluding tropical and extreme polar seas. The species prefer subtropical and subpolar waters, and in the western Atlantic, ranges from Greenland and Iceland south to the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. New England waters are probably on the southern edge of the northern feeding range of the species. These whales migrate during the summer north to the Gulf of Maine and Canadian waters. The species may unpredictably occur in random areas and their movement patterns are still not well known.

**DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND WATERS:** Sightings in coastal New England are uncommon in the spring and fall of some years. Shifts in prey availability and avoidance of Killer Whales may contribute to shifts in distribution. The Sei Whale is frequently observed in the deeper waters of the Gulf of Maine. The species is considered to be relatively abundant in the North Atlantic.



*Photo courtesy of NOAA*

**LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY:** Sei Whales live between 50 and 70 years, reaching sexual maturity at 6 to 12 years and around 13 m in length. Females breed every 2 to 3 years and have a gestation period of approximately one year, with breeding and calving occurring during late fall and winter. Sei Whales usually travel singly or in small groups of 2 to 5 animals. Occasionally, they are found in larger loose aggregations of 30 to 50 individuals. The species' diet mainly consists of plankton (such as copepods and krill), small schooling fish, and cephalopods (such as squid). They prefer to feed at dawn and can dive for 5 to 20 minutes to retrieve prey. Calves nurse for 6 to 9 months and are weaned on the feeding grounds. The Sei Whale has few predators that are capable of killing them. These include the Killer Whale and larger sharks. Sea Lampreys, "cookie-cutter" sharks, or parasitic copepods may be the cause of small white scars seen on many Sei Whales.

**POPULATION STATUS:** The Sei Whale is classified as an Endangered species in Massachusetts and under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Commercial

*A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; [www.mass.gov/dfw](http://www.mass.gov/dfw)

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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whaling was been a major historic cause of population decline; however, the estimated worldwide population is estimated to have grown to 80,000 since whaling was outlawed. Although Sei Whales are considered to be relatively abundant in the North Atlantic and North Pacific oceans, populations in the Southern Oceans remain severely depleted.

**STRANDED WHALES:** For all live or dead marine mammal strandings, please call one of the following hot lines:

For Cape Cod: 508-743-9548  
IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue and Research

For areas near Boston: 617-973-5247  
New England Aquarium

For all other areas: 978-281-9300  
National Marine Fisheries Service, Gloucester

Be prepared to provide the following information:

- Name and contact number
- Location of animal with detailed description and nearby landmarks, if possible
- Number, size, and type of animal
- Any other helpful information such as behavior or tidal cycle

Keep a safe distance away from the animal. For mass strandings of two or more animals and large whales, the International Fund for Animal Welfare will establish an incident command system where respondents will have logo gear and/or vests.

For all dead marine mammals, please describe:

- If the carcass is marked with grease pen or tagged, note the tag's color, number, and position on the animal.

Though every carcass cannot be removed due to budget limitations, it is required by law that data and samples be collected from every dead marine mammal that comes to shore.

## REFERENCE

Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*). Office of Protected Resources , NOAA Fisheries. URL:  
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/cetaceans/seiwhale.htm>

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