

READING CHALLENGE

The Biggest Animal in the World

The blue whale is bigger than any dinosaur

Level	A1 — Beginner
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Age Group	Teens (11-16)
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Topic	True Stories
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Duration	~8 min read
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Skill	Reading
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What is the biggest animal in the world? It is not an elephant. It is not a dinosaur. The biggest animal in the world lives in the **ocean**. It is the blue **whale**. Blue whales are **huge**. They are the biggest animals that ever lived on Earth. Yes, bigger than any dinosaur!

How Big Is a Blue Whale?

A blue whale can be about 30 metres long. That is as long as three school buses in a line. It can **weigh** up to 200 tonnes. That is heavier than 25 elephants together! Even a baby blue whale is big. A newborn baby is about 7 metres long. That is longer than most cars.

Blue whales are not really blue. They look blue under the water. But when they come out of the water, they are more grey. They have small spots on their skin. Every whale has different spots. Scientists use the spots to tell one whale from another. It is like a fingerprint for whales.

A Heart as Big as a Car

Everything about a blue whale is big. Its **heart** is the size of a small car. You can hear its heartbeat from three kilometres away. Its **tongue** is as heavy as an elephant. Its mouth is so big that it could hold 100 people inside. But do not worry — blue whales do not eat people!

The blood vessels of a blue whale are so wide that a small child could swim through them. Its eyes are about the size of a grapefruit. That sounds big, but for such a huge animal, the eyes are actually very small. Blue whales do not see very well. They use sound to find their way in the dark ocean.

What Do Blue Whales Eat?

This is the most surprising thing about blue whales. The biggest animal in the world eats some of the smallest animals in the world. Blue whales eat **krill**. Krill are tiny sea animals. They are only about 5 centimetres long. They look like very small shrimp.

A blue whale eats about 4 tonnes of krill every day. That is about 40 million krill in one day! How does it eat so many? The whale opens its mouth very wide. It takes in a huge amount of water and krill. Then it pushes the water out through special plates in its mouth called baleen. The baleen works like a filter. The water goes out, but the krill stays inside. Then the whale swallows the krill. It is like using a very big net.

Blue Whales Are Not Fish

Blue whales live in the sea, but they are not fish. They are **mammals**, just like dogs, cats, and people. This means three important things. First, they need air to breathe. They cannot stay under water forever. A blue whale must come to the **surface** to take a **breath**. It breathes through a hole on top of its head. When it breathes out, water sprays up into the air. This spray can be 9 metres tall!

Second, baby whales drink milk from their mother. A baby blue whale is called a **calf**. The calf drinks about 200 litres of milk every day. The milk is very thick and rich. It has ten times more fat than cow's milk. This helps the baby grow very fast. A baby blue whale can gain about 90 kilograms every day. That is like gaining the weight of a grown man every single

day!

Third, blue whales are warm-blooded. The ocean is cold, but a blue whale's body stays warm. It has a thick layer of fat under its skin. This fat is called blubber. The blubber keeps the whale warm, even in very cold water.

How Blue Whales Live

Blue whales swim in all the world's oceans. They travel very long distances. In summer, they go to cold waters near the North Pole or South Pole. The water there has a lot of krill. In winter, they swim to warmer waters near the equator. Some blue whales travel 16,000 kilometres every year. That is almost half way around the world!

Blue whales usually swim alone or in pairs. Sometimes they swim in a small group called a **pod**. A pod usually has two to four whales. They are not like dolphins, which swim in big groups. Blue whales like their space.

Blue whales talk to each other using very deep sounds. These sounds are so deep that people cannot hear them. But the sounds can travel through the ocean for thousands of kilometres. A blue whale in one part of the ocean can hear another blue whale very far away. In fact, blue whales are the loudest animals on Earth. Their calls can reach 188 decibels. That is louder than a jet engine!

Baby Blue Whales

A mother blue whale carries her baby for about 10 to 12 months. When the baby is born, it is already 7 metres long and weighs about 2,700 kilograms. The mother and calf stay very close together. The mother **protects** her baby from sharks and other dangers. The calf drinks milk for about seven months. After that, it starts to eat krill.

Young blue whales stay with their mothers for about one year. Then they go off on their own. A blue whale can live for 80 to 90 years. Some scientists think they can live even longer — maybe 100 years or more.

Blue Whales in Danger

Blue whales are **endangered**. This means there are not many left in the world. Why? Because people **hunted** them. In the 1900s, people killed blue whales for their oil and meat. Whale oil was used in lamps, soap, and machines. Between 1900 and 1966, hunters killed about 360,000 blue whales. That is a terrible number. The blue whale population dropped from about 350,000 to fewer than 1,000.

In 1966, the world banned blue whale hunting. This means it became illegal to kill blue whales. Slowly, very slowly, the numbers started to grow again. Today, there are about 10,000 to 25,000 blue whales in the world. That is better than 1,000, but it is still very few for such a large ocean.

Blue whales still face dangers today. Big ships sometimes hit them. Noise from ships and machines in the ocean makes it hard for whales to communicate. Pollution in the water can make them sick. And climate change is warming the ocean, which can change where krill

lives. If the krill moves, the whales must move too — and they might not find enough food.

Why Blue Whales Matter

Blue whales are important for the ocean. When they eat krill and then go to the surface to breathe, their waste helps tiny plants in the ocean grow. These tiny plants make oxygen — the same oxygen that we breathe. So in a way, blue whales help us breathe too!

Many people travel to places like Iceland, Norway, Mexico, and Australia to see blue whales. Whale watching is a popular activity. People go out in boats and wait. When a blue whale comes to the surface and sprays water into the air, everyone cheers. It is an amazing thing to see — the biggest animal in the world, swimming right there in front of you.

The blue whale is a reminder of how wonderful our planet is. An animal as big as three buses, with a heart the size of a car, eating animals smaller than your finger, living in every ocean on Earth. If we protect the oceans, we protect the blue whales. And if we protect the blue whales, we help keep our planet healthy for everyone.

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	whale	a very large animal that lives in the sea and breathes air
2	ocean	a very large area of salt water, like the Atlantic or Pacific
3	weigh	to be a certain heaviness, like 50 kilograms
4	huge	very, very big
5	breath	the air that goes in and out of your body
6	surface	the top part of the water or the ground
7	heart	the part inside your body that pumps blood
8	tongue	the soft part inside your mouth that helps you eat and taste food
9	calf	a baby whale or a baby cow
10	hunt	to look for and catch animals for food
11	protect	to keep someone or something safe from danger
12	mammal	an animal that drinks milk from its mother when it is a baby
13	pod	a small group of whales that swim together
14	endangered	in danger of disappearing from the world forever
15	krill	very small sea animals that look like tiny shrimp

Comprehension Quiz

1. How long can a blue whale be?

- A) About 10 metres
- B) About 30 metres
- C) About 100 metres
- D) About 5 metres

2. What do blue whales eat?

- A) Big fish like sharks
- B) Tiny animals called krill
- C) Plants from the bottom of the sea
- D) Other whales

3. How big is a blue whale's heart?

- A) As big as a football
- B) As big as a small car
- C) As big as a house
- D) As big as a hand

4. Why are blue whales endangered?

- A) Because they eat too much krill
- B) Because people hunted too many of them in the past
- C) Because the ocean is too small for them
- D) Because they cannot swim fast

5. How much milk does a baby blue whale drink every day?

- A) About 2 litres
- B) About 20 litres
- C) About 200 litres
- D) About 2,000 litres

Answer Key

Q	Answer	Question
1	B	How long can a blue whale be?
2	B	What do blue whales eat?
3	B	How big is a blue whale's heart?
4	B	Why are blue whales endangered?
5	C	How much milk does a baby blue whale drink every day?