

[Page 23 - The Whales in Cape Breton's Waters](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 16](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/6/1

in the wintertime and anyone who sees a whale in the wintertime and can document it with a photo, that would be good. Each whale has a diagnostic feature; if you see that you can name it, and can convince me. Like the Minke Whale has a white patch on the flipper. The Fin Whale has a white lower right jaw • just as it comes up you can see that on the right side--the Blue whale doesn't have that. The Blue whale has the U-shaped rostrum looking down on it. The Fin whale has a V-shaped rostrum like the Sei Whale and the Minke. "Strandings are also important. Quite conceivably in Cape Breton's history you have had a Sperm Whale stranding. One in deep water may have come ashore to die; it may have died at sea. In Newfoundland a few years ago they had a live Sperm Whale stranding. The animal only lived a few hours. It was probably sick as it was out of its natural habitat. It would be living and eating about 100 miles off-shore. You may have had large baleen strandings as well. Information of this kind would be invaluable. Ask your readers to send in information • especially photographs and news clippings stuck in the attic. Ask them to write descriptions of evidence other than pictures • like bones. "Another thing to ask your readers for • has anybody seen the thrasher and the swordfish attacking a whale? This is a well-known story in different parts of the world. The thrasher and the swordfish. The story goes as follows: that the thrasher and the swordfish attack a whale simultaneously. The swordfish comes up from underneath and cuts the whale's belly and the thrasher flies up through the air and lands on top of the whale at the same time. And if this can be documented by a photograph, showing both species plus the whale • first of all it would tell us what these species are • they may be thrasher sharks', they may be killer whales, they may be swordfish. And secondly, there is no evidence in the rest of the world that two species can communicate to the extent they can attack a third species simultaneously. And if the fishermen's stories are correct • and we have now several dozen of them from this area and about 50 from around the world • then you would have evidence of a fairly high degree of communication between species that really has never been discovered. Your readers should write if they've seen anything like this. "There is less than 1% of knowledge of whales as compared with what's known about other animals. People live with monkeys and write whole books. But you see whales for a minute and they dive for 10 or 15 minutes • and you don't know what they do beneath the surface. We have no information at night and no information in the wintertime • and that's a lot of lack of information." Humpback's nose (photo Scott Krauss); characteristic hump as it rocks into terminal dive, followed by flukes as it dives for about 10 minutes (photos Peter Beamish). We hope our readers will write to us about whale experiences and strandings either in recent years or long ago. It would be good to hear of traditional stories relating to whales. Please search out old photos and newsclippings and write to us about bones that have been found. All this information will be passed along to Peter Beamish at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography. Our thanks to Peter Beamish, Bedford Institute of Oceanography/ and to D.W. Sergeant



of the Arctic Biological Station, for supplying us with considerable materials in preparation for this article. Our thanks as well to Arnet Sheppard, NATURE CANADA, and Dr. Edward Mitchell, Arctic Biological Station, for permission to use the drawings done by Bonnie Dalzell and Betty Osborne under Dr. Mitchell's direction and published in NATURE CANADA Oct/Dec 1973. We recommend taking an active interest in the work of GREENPEACE, 2007, W. 4th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1N3~and PROJECT JONAH Box 476, Bolinas, California, 94924. Send each a donation and ask for literature about their work to save the whales. Suggested further reading; Ommanney's LOST LEVI- McIntyre's MIND IN THE WATERS, AUDUBON MAGAZINE, January, 1975.