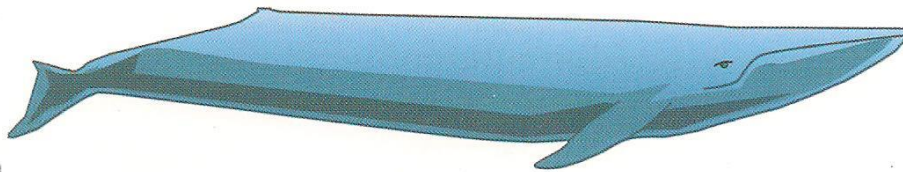


# The Blue Whale

by Michelle Kelly

photographs by Mike Johnson



The blue whale is the largest animal that has ever lived on our planet—much larger than any of the dinosaurs!

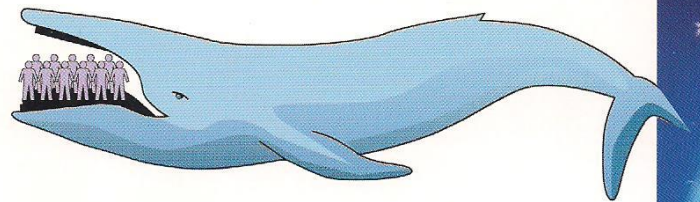
When you were born, you weighed about the same as a small cat. When a blue whale is born, it weighs more than a fully grown African elephant. That's about the same weight as 140 ten-year-old kids!

A blue whale grows to the same length as eighteen people lying head to toe. If an adult blue whale stood on its tail, it would be as tall as a six-storey building.

Think of a small car. Now imagine something that size beating inside your chest. That's how big a blue whale's heart is.

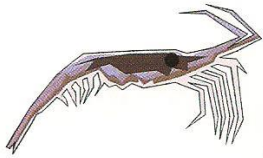
A blue whale's tongue is so large, an entire football team would be able to stand on it.

You might think that such an enormous animal has enormous teeth. Actually, a blue whale doesn't have any teeth. Instead, it



has something like a giant hair comb made from keratin, the same stuff that your fingernails are made from.

When a blue whale opens its mouth, it takes in huge gulps of water, which contains krill—the tiny creatures that blue whales feed on. Then, using its tongue, it pushes the water out through the gaps in its giant comb, and the krill stay inside the whale’s mouth.



Because they’re so huge, blue whales need plenty of room to move. They swim far apart and keep in touch with each other through their calls, which need to be loud enough to communicate across oceans. Next time you’re in a room by yourself, yell out and listen for the echo. Imagine that noise underwater as loud as a jet engine. That’s how loud a blue whale’s call is. A blue whale makes the loudest and lowest sound of any living creature.

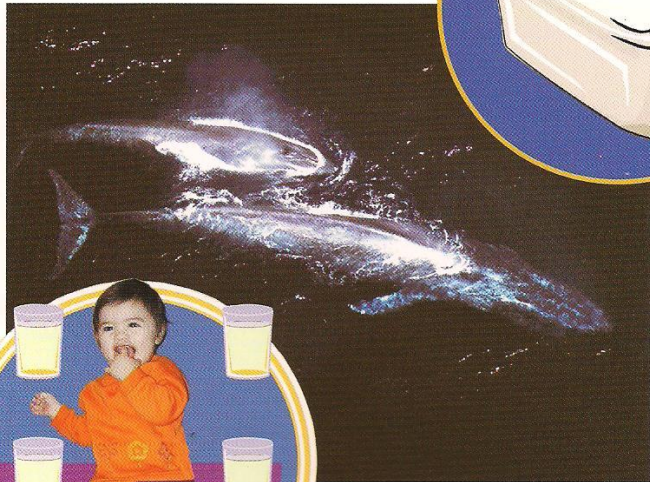
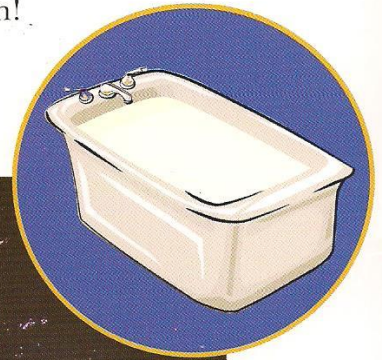
Maybe you think you don’t have much in

common with a blue whale, but you’re both mammals, which means you’re more alike than you’d think.

Most human babies drink milk from their mom. So does a baby blue! A human baby drinks the equivalent of four glasses of milk each day, and a baby blue drinks about a bathtub of milk each day. That’s two hundred times more than a human baby!

If you’re feeling tired, you’ll probably take a nap. So does a baby blue, but you’ll curl up in a warm, cozy bed, and a baby blue sleeps floating near the surface of the ocean!

A blue whale breathes air like you do, but it



doesn't breathe automatically like you. It has to remember to come up to the ocean's surface to breathe or it will drown. This is why only half a whale's brain goes to sleep at a time! Think about how it feels when you're almost asleep but can still wake easily. That's how lightly a blue whale sleeps.

Blue whales and people both have warm blood pumping around their bodies. Imagine that your veins and arteries were big enough for a baby to crawl through. A blue whale's are. They're bigger than a drainpipe!

A blue whale can live about as long as a person can. Some blue whales live for ninety years or



more. That's a long time to be swimming around.

Many people are surprised to learn that they have things in common with blue whales until they remember that blue whales are mammals, too. So next time you take a deep breath, see a baby drinking from its mother, or imagine your warm blood pumping around your body, think about the blue whale—the giant that's a lot like you.

### Glossary

**artery:** a large vein that carries blood from the heart

**keratin:** a tough protein that hair, nails, horns, and hoofs are made from

**krill:** a small shrimp-like creature

**mammal:** a warm-blooded animal that produces milk for its young

**vein:** a tube in your body that carries blood to the heart

