

Song of the Humpback

1 Herman Melville, the writer of the famous whale story *Moby Dick*, once wrote that humpback whales were “the most lighthearted¹ of all the whales.” A favorite of whale watchers everywhere, they swim in ocean areas close to land, and are
5 active at the surface. They can often be seen breaching, or **leaping** out of the water, and then coming down with a great splash. Humpbacks are known to be intelligent animals and can be seen working together to hunt schools of small fish. And, if you listen closely, you might even hear one singing.

10 | Recording Gentle Giants

Marine biologist² Jim Darling has studied the songs of humpback whales for more than 25 years. While recording whale songs on a boat near Hawaii, he invited author Douglas Chadwick to experience diving with a humpback. In the water,
15 Chadwick heard the whale’s songs in a way he never heard them before. “Suddenly, I no longer heard the whale’s voice in my ears,” he said. “I felt it inside my head and bones.”

¹ Someone or something that is **lighthearted** is cheerful and happy.

² A **marine biologist** is a scientist who studies life in the ocean.

When swimming with the whale, Chadwick could see that the whale was **aware** of him, but not **alarmed** by his presence.

20 The 13-meter-long giant looked him over³ **curiously**, but never harmed him. The whale then swam under the boat. It pointed its head down to the ocean floor and, with flippers⁴ extended out to its sides, began to sing. Up in the boat, Darling recorded the whale's song. Humpback whale songs can be long and

25 **complex**, sometimes lasting for 30 minutes or more. They are perhaps the longest songs sung by any animal.

Why Do They Sing?

Darling says that only male humpbacks sing, but for **unknown** reasons. It was previously thought that they sang to attract

30 females, but scientists showed this was incorrect when they played recordings of whale songs in the ocean and the female whales did not respond. Another idea is that male humpbacks compete with each other using songs, just as other male animals on land do using their antlers or tusks.⁵

35 Researchers have also found that humpback whale songs are different in different parts of the world, perhaps like whale national anthems.⁶ They may also be like hit tunes on the radio, changing over time—from one year to the next, or even over a

single breeding **season**.

40 There is still so much the scientists don't know, and years of study lie ahead for whale researchers like Jim Darling. "Why do I do it?" he wonders aloud. "Human beings like puzzles. I want to know. Period."

Another member of the research team, photographer Flip

45 Nicklin, recalls a special moment he had while **interacting** with a humpback. While he was snorkeling some distance from the huge animal, it approached him until it was just a few meters away. It then gently carried Nicklin toward its eye with a flipper, as if examining him. **Apparently**, the urge to understand a

50 different species goes both ways.

3 If you **look** something **over**, you examine it for a short period of time.

4 **Flippers** are the two flat body parts that stick out from the side of a whale, seal, etc.

5 **Antlers** are long, branched horns that grow on the heads of some animals, like deer or moose; **tusks** are the long, pointed teeth of some animals, like walruses.

6 A **national anthem** is a country's song, chosen by a country's government to represent its people.

Reading Comprehension


Multiple Choice. Choose the best answer for each question.

- Gist** 1. What is this reading mainly about?
a. how to record humpbacks in the ocean
b. how humpbacks communicate with people
c. humpback songs and what they might mean
d. the career of a man who is interested in humpbacks
- Detail** 2. When the scientists played whale songs in the ocean, _____.
a. the songs attracted fish
b. no female whales came
c. male whales became angry
d. male and female whales sang together
- Detail** 3. What is NOT true about humpback whales?
a. Their songs are short and simple.
b. Only male humpback whales sing.
c. Their songs differ from place to place.
d. They are popular with whale watchers.
- Detail** 4. The passage compares humpback songs to *hit tunes on the radio* because _____.
a. the whales' songs are beautiful
b. the whales sing songs very often
c. the songs can last over 30 minutes
d. the whales change their songs often
- Inference** 5. In line 43, why does Darling say *Period?*
a. to stress a long period of time
b. to compare humans and puzzles
c. to emphasize the previous sentence
d. to let the listener know he plans to say more
- Vocabulary** 6. In line 49, the word *urge* could be replaced by _____.
a. need b. way
c. difficulty d. ability
- Main Idea** 7. What do Chadwick and Nicklin have in common?
a. They were afraid of whales.
b. They swam with the whales.
c. Their jobs are to take photos of the whales.
d. They are marine biologists studying whales.

Did You Know?

The tail of each humpback has a different shape and different patterns. Researchers use these patterns to identify the whales they study.





Vocabulary Practice

A. Completion. Complete the sentences using words from the box. One word is extra.

alarmed **apparently** **aware** **interact** **leap** **single**

1. Whales generally come up to breathe every 15 minutes, but some can hold their breath for up to an hour on a(n) _____ dive.
2. Many people are not _____ that many of the whales they see on whale-watching tours are later killed in areas where whaling is still allowed.
3. _____, there are some whale species that do not seem to migrate at all. They spend the entire year in one place.
4. Whales, sharks, and stingrays are animals that have been known to _____ from the water to catch their prey.
5. A whale-watching boat should move away from any whale that appears _____ by the boat's movements.

B. Definitions. Read the information. Then complete the definitions using the words in **red**.

Like humpbacks, blue whales sing **complex** songs. And like humpbacks, they are endangered. Fortunately, there are now laws that protect blue whales. Today, although their exact number is **unknown**, the blue whale population seems to be growing. Scientists are **curious** to know more about blue whale behavior, so they placed cameras on the whales. Through these cameras, it is possible to watch the whales as they swim, eat, and **interact** with each other. Using the whale cameras, scientists discovered that during breeding **season**, the females migrate to very food-rich areas to have their babies.

1. If something is _____, it has many parts and is difficult to understand.
2. A(n) _____ refers to a particular period of time during the year.
3. If something is _____, you have no knowledge of it.
4. When people or animals _____, they spend time together and communicate.
5. Someone who is _____ about something wants to learn or know more about it.

Thesaurus

leap Also look up:
(v.) *jump, dive, soar,*
fly, hop, spring

