



## Scientists Thrilled by Rise in Blue Whale Numbers

### What are blue whales?

- Blue whales are the world's largest animal. Like all whales, they are mammals, not fish.
- The Antarctic blue whale lives in the ocean around Antarctica and mostly eats krill.

**The blue whale is making a comeback! Scientists were amazed by how many blue whales they saw in an Antarctic survey.**

A team of scientists were working with the British Antarctic Survey. They counted the number of whales around the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia. In 23 days, they counted 55 blue whales!

"This is an unprecedented number of sightings," the scientists said.

Blue whales are the world's largest animal and can reach 30m long. That's about the length of two and a half buses!

However, they are **endangered** and it is very rare to see them in the wild. This is because they were hunted in the past for their meat and **blubber**.

In 1966, governments introduced a global ban on hunting blue and humpback whales. This was followed by a global ban on all **commercial** whaling in 1986.

Since then, the number of blue whales has risen. Even so, scientists were amazed to see so many!

"We are thrilled to see so many whales visiting South Georgia to feed again," project leader Dr Jennifer Jackson said. "It is clear that protection from whaling has worked."

South Georgia is a popular feeding site for whales because there are so many krill. These are small animals which whales eat by the million.

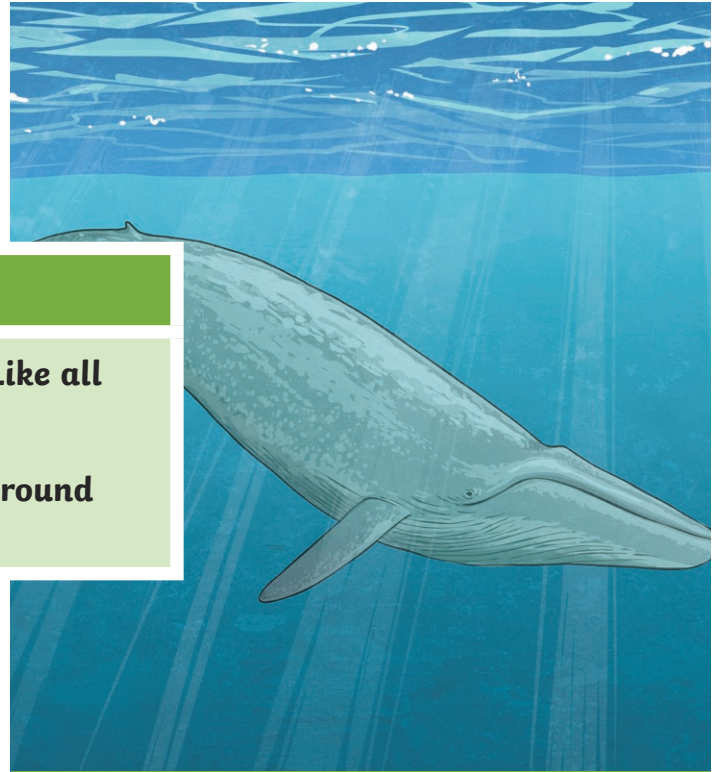


Illustration: A blue whale in the ocean.

It's not just blue whales which are making a comeback. In the same survey, the team saw 790 humpback whales in 21 days!

The team believe this means that the humpback whale is "close to full recovery" in the area around South Georgia.

This study shows that whale numbers are on the rise but there is still a way to go. Blue whales are still listed as endangered. Scientists and governments will carry on working to protect these wondrous whales.

### Glossary

<b>survey</b>	An investigation to find the numbers of animals in an area.
<b>endangered</b>	An animal species at risk of being wiped out.
<b>blubber</b>	The fat of sea mammals, such as whales or seals.
<b>commercial</b>	Activities concerned with buying, selling or making money.

# Questions

1. “This is an unprecedented number of sightings,” the scientists said.’  
Tick the word or phrase which is closest in meaning to ‘unprecedented’ in this sentence.

- common
- extraordinary
- impossible
- unpopular

2. Tick a box in each row to show whether each statement is true or false.

	True	False
Scientists counted 55 blue whales in 23 days.		
Hunting blue whales was first banned in 1986.		
The team believes humpback whales are becoming extinct.		
Blue whales eat a lot of krill.		

3. What language does the author use to make clear how big whales are for the reader?

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4. Do you think that this team of scientists are in favour of the hunting ban? Explain your answer using a quote from the news story.

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5. Why were scientists amazed to see so many whales?

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6. By the end of the story, the author wants the reader to know that...

- Everything is great for blue whales!
- Numbers of every species of whale are increasing.
- The number of blue whales is up but more work is needed.
- Whales are fascinating.

# Answers

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2. Tick a box in each row to show whether each statement is true or false.

	True	False
Scientists counted 55 blue whales in 23 days.	✓	
Hunting blue whales was first banned in 1986.		✓
The team believes humpback whales are becoming extinct.		✓
Blue whales eat a lot of krill.	✓	

3. What language does the author use to make clear how big whales are for the reader?  
**That’s about the length of two and a half buses!**

4. Do you think that this team of scientists are in favour of the hunting ban? Explain your answer using a quote from the news story.  
**Accept any reasonable answer which includes a relevant quote from the news story, e.g. I think they are because the project leader says “It is clear that protection from whaling has worked.”**

5. Why were scientists amazed to see so many blue whales?  
**Scientists were amazed to see so many blue whales because blue whales are endangered and it is rare to see them in the wild.**

6. By the end of the story, the author wants the reader to know that...

- Everything is great for blue whales!
- Numbers of every species of whale are increasing.
- The number of blue whales is up but more work is needed.**
- Whales are fascinating.