

Booderee National Park

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Whale watching

Booderee National Park provides fabulous opportunities for terrestrial based whale watching. The best location is at the historic [Cape St George Lighthouse](#) at the end of Stoney Creek Road.

Humpback and southern right whales begin their northerly migration in early June and continue to the first week in July. They are heading to their breeding grounds in the warmer Queensland waters.

It is possible to spot many whales in one day. Over 2,000 make the yearly migration. They make the return journey around September to November and it is possible to spot the young calves making their first journey to the Antarctic.

How to spot a whale

The best time to spot a whale from a terrestrial position, such as at the [Cape St George Lighthouse](#), is in the late morning or early afternoon, on a clear and calm day. The glare from the sun will be lessened at these times allowing for clearer viewing.

Whale watching is an activity that often requires some patience and a good set of binoculars. However, on some days, more often during the southerly migration in spring, whales will come very close to shore and may spend time frolicking in sheltered bays with their newly born calves. When whales do come close to shore it is important to remain quiet and not disturb them.

This is for the benefit of both the whales and the whale watchers, as the whales will be more likely to remain visible if not startled or stressed.



Humpback whale | Image courtesy of [ORRCA](#)

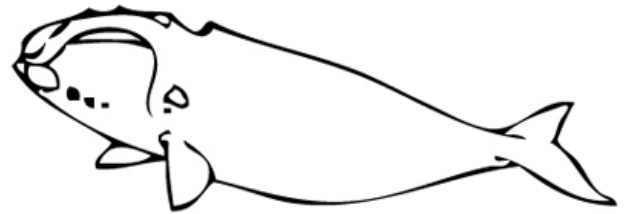
Humpback whales

Humpback whales were nearly hunted to extinction. The last whaling station in NSW, at Byron Bay, closed in 1962 because so few whales could be found. Humpback whales are now protected throughout Australia and in NSW are listed as a vulnerable species under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.

The humpback whale is one of the most easily recognisable of the large whales. Often the first sign of its presence is its 'blow', a cloud of vapour that it shoots into the air when it breaks the surface to breathe. They can be identified by their amazing show of breaches, rolls and fluke up dives.

Southern right whale

By the 1840s, southern right whales had been hunted out, and the whaling industry had collapsed. Populations of southern rights have been recovering ever since. Today, scientists estimate that there are around 5000 southern right whales in the world. Southern right whales are protected throughout Australia, and are listed as a threatened species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act.



Southern right whale | Image courtesy of [ORRCA](#)

The southern right whale has two blow holes and they produce a distinctive V-shaped cloud of vapour blown out when the whale surfaces to breathe.

Partnerships

During the whale migration times you may meet up with an ORRCA volunteer. They have been recording sightings for up to 10 years along the Australian coast. They are a source of knowledge about the whales and are happy to share their information. ORRCA plays a vital role in the rescue of and research into whales and also dolphins and seals. The hotline is 02 9415 3333.

Natural History

Whales are warm blooded, air breathing mammals that give birth to live young. They are of the scientific order Cetacea. Therefore, you may sometimes hear of whales, dolphins and porpoises referred to as cetaceans.

The first indication of the presence of a whale is often the plume of water it sprays from the blowhole on top of its head when breaching. For the Humpback whale this will usually take place every 10 minutes, but diving times can extend for as long as 45 minutes. The Southern Right Whale may often be seen breaching up to ten times in a row.

The Humpback whale and Southern Right Whale are a type of baleen whale. This means that they do not have teeth, but long horny plates edged with bristle like fibres called 'baleen'. In order to feed, they take large gulps of water, which is strained back through the baleen, leaving krill and other crustaceans in the whale's mouth.

The gestation period for baleen whales is usually about 12 months. Once born, the calf will stay with its mother for 6-10 months and will often maintain a lasting bond. Further scientific research into whales is needed to understand and preserve this charismatic mammal.

Humans and Whales

Humans and whales have not always had a happy relationship. During the 19th century, whales were sought after for their valuable oil. In the 1800s in Australia, whales were plentiful along the coasts and so could be hunted by crews in open boats deployed from land. This was in addition to large fleets that operated at sea.

The large scale whaling operations of this era depleted the stocks of many species of whale to the point of extinction. If stocks are given the chance to recover, sightings near land may become more frequent.

Some nations value whale meat as a source of food and the activity itself for its cultural significance. This makes the resumption of commercial whaling an attractive prospect for some. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was established in the 1940s and has responsibility for governing the conduct of whaling, so that whale stocks are conserved. A recent meeting of the IWC was held at Anchorage, Alaska in 2007. After much debate and speculation, a majority of members voted to maintain the tenuous moratorium on commercial whaling.



Photo: Mark Simmons | Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority