
An Annotated List of the Marine Mammals of British Columbia

by Robin W. Baird and Pam J. Stacey

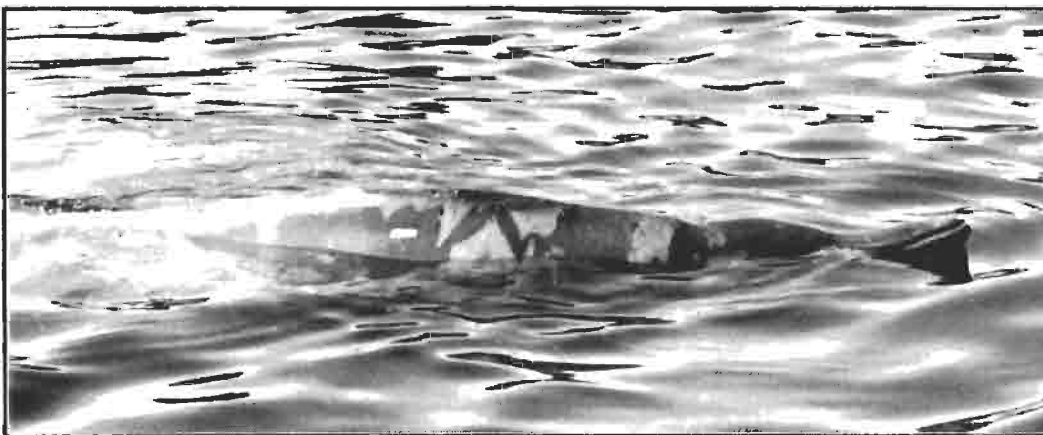
The following is an annotated list of marine mammals of British Columbia. Three of the species included have not yet been recorded from B.C. waters, but have been recorded from adjacent waters to the south and may eventually be recorded here. A single species of terrestrial mammal commonly occurring in the marine environment in B.C. is also included, making a total of 33 species of mammals potentially found in the marine waters of B.C. This list is only as accurate as available records allow, and unpublished or otherwise unavailable records may surface and warrant re-evaluation of status. For larger and typically offshore species, status is based predominantly on whaling records and sightings prior to 1967, summarized by Pike and MacAskie (1969). Little has been published on the status of these species in B.C. waters since then. For the smaller, less common species the status is for the most part based on as yet unpublished records: from stranded animals in the last few years reported to the Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program (Baird *et al.*, 1988; Stacey *et al.*, 1989) or records held at the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Pacific Biological Station; from animals caught incidentally in the Canadian experimental drift-net fishery for flying squid (*Ommastrephes bartrami*) from 1983 through 1987 (Jamieson and Heritage, 1988); from records submitted by Department of Fisheries and Oceans vessels participating in the B.C. Cetacean Sighting Program; and from records called in to the Whale Hotline, operated by The Whale Museum in Friday Harbor.

The list covers the entire B.C. coast and waters up to 320 kilometres (200 miles) offshore, within the Canadian extended economic zone. This leads to some problems in general applicability to small areas, as some species are found year-round in large numbers in some parts of the province (e.g., Steller sea lion) but are present elsewhere only seasonally.

Other species such as the Pacific white-sided dolphin are largely offshore around southern Vancouver Island, but in northern areas regularly make inshore movements. Additionally, there are more records in southern B.C. waters due to more sighting effort, so this list may be more accurate for southern areas. However, marine mammals regularly make short-term long-range movements, more similar to birds than to terrestrial mammals, and almost any species could be found throughout the area covered. It is more likely, however, for offshore species to occasionally stray into nearshore areas, or die and wash up on shore, than for species dependent on shallow habitats (such as the otters, or the gray whale) to move offshore.

Effort for all species is biased towards summer, but listings of seasonal presence of offshore species may be more biased than for nearshore species, where some records may be strandings, sightings from shore, or sightings in protected waters.

This list differs from bird checklists in that the terms of relative abundance for the various species are not based strictly on absolute number, but rather take into consideration the abundance of the species in British Columbia as compared to elsewhere in the world. Thus harbour seals, with an estimated population of about 75,000, and killer whales, with a population of about 350, are both considered common. This is because compared to their abundance elsewhere in the world, killer whales certainly are common in B.C. References are provided to refer individuals to further information if up-to-date publications or reports are available. A comprehensive review of the status of all species based on records prior to 1967 can be found in Pike and MacAskie (1969). The definitions for terms of status provided below are generally based on those used in avian checklists.



A beaked whale (Mesoplodon sp.) that could not be positively identified to species, temporarily beached near Nanaimo, B.C., August 5, 1979. Most of the markings on its back are likely peeling skin due to extended exposure to the sun. Photo by Michael A. Bigg, Pacific Biological Station.

List of Terms:

- C** Common. Moderate to large numbers.
FC Fairly Common. Low to moderate numbers.
U Uncommon. Usually in low numbers or irregular.
R Rare. Occurs most years but usually few records per year.
V Vagrant. Not expected annually but more than five records.
A Accidental. Five or fewer records, outside normal range.
H Hypothetical. Not yet recorded, but recorded from adjacent waters.
L Local. May be fairly common but in localized areas.
O Offshore. Generally in open waters, offshore.
I Inshore. Generally in inshore waters, or within several miles of the west coast of Vancouver Island.
(8) Number of Confirmed Records (accidental and vagrant only).
Y Year-round.
S Summer. June to August.
F Fall. September to November.
W Winter. December to February.
Sp Spring. March to May.

Porpoises

Dall's porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*) C-Y -- (Jefferson, in press).

Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) C-I-Y.

Dolphins

Pacific white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*) C-O/U-I-L-Y -- (Stacey and Baird, 1989).

Striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) V-(8)-W-Sp-- (Baird and Stacey in prep).

Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) A-(1) -- a single animal found dead on the beach in Victoria, April 1953 (Guiguet, 1954).

Northern right whale dolphin (*Lissodelphis borealis*) R-O-Y -- (Baird and Stacey, 1989a).

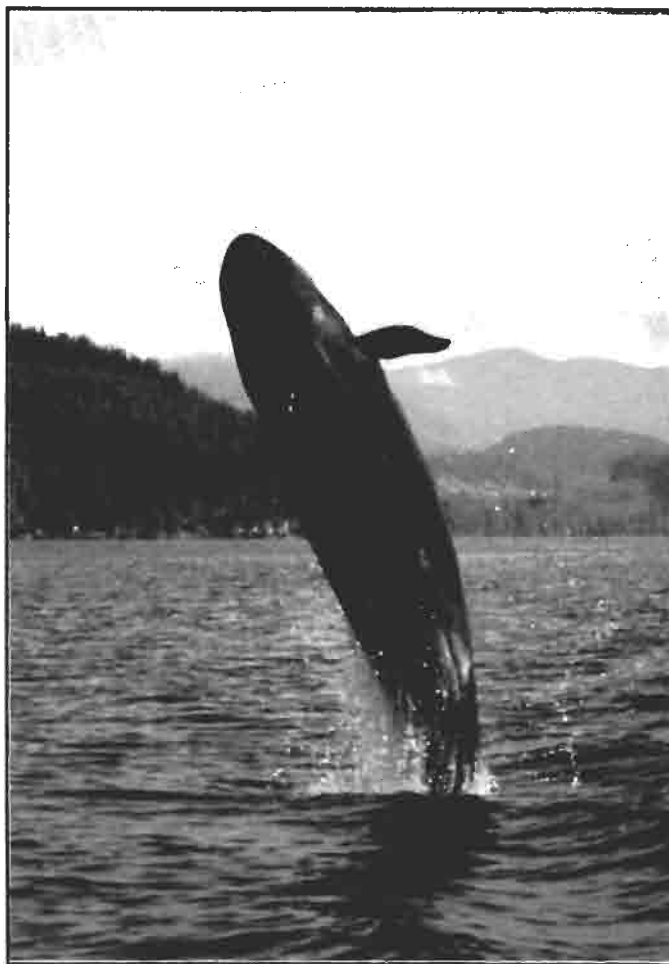
Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) R-Y (Baird and Stacey, 1989b).

Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) H-A -- one record of a stranding from near Anacortes, WA (Osborne and Ransom, 1988). Normal distribution is only to central California, and considering the extreme range extension of this record, it is possible the animal had escaped from captivity.

False killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) V-(7)-Sp-S-F -- (Baird *et al.*, 1989). All records since 1987; four records may be repeat sightings of the same individual over a two year period, in one small geographical area, making the species accidental, but this cannot be confirmed.

Short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) R-O-Sp-S-F (Baird and Stacey, 1989c).

Killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) C-Y (Bigg *et al.*, 1987).



A false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) near Tzartus Island, Barkley Sound, July 29, 1989. This individual had been in the general area for several months. Pectoral flipper shape is diagnostic for this species. L.M. Barry/R.W. Baird photo.

Sperm Whales

Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) C-O-Y.

Dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia simus*) A-(1) -- one live stranding of a single animal at Pachena Bay, west side of Vancouver Island, in September 1981 (Nagorsen and Stewart, 1983). In accordance with the definitions of terms given above, this record must be considered accidental. Even in regions where large numbers of strandings occur (e.g., Florida), this species and the one listed below (*K. breviceps*) are seldom sighted live, possibly because of their small size, avoidance of boats, and low inconspicuous blow.

Pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) H-A -- three records from Washington State, from May, June and October (Osborne *et al.*, 1988) make an eventual sighting in B.C. likely.

Beaked Whales

Baird's beaked whale (*Berardius bairdii*) R-0-Y.

Hubbs' beaked whale (*Mesoplodon carlhubbsi*) A-(4) -- two additional records of *Mesoplodon* sp. exist from B.C. but can

not be identified to species (Osborne *et al.*, 1988). Therefore the status of this species or of *M. stejnegeri*, below, could possibly be upgraded to vagrant.

Stejneger's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon stejnegeri*) A-(5).

Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) R-O-W-Sp-S.

Baleen Whales

Right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) V-O-Y -- two animals were seen on Swiftsure Bank off the Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1983 (Osborne *et al.*, 1988).

Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) U-L-Sp-S-F.

Blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) R-O-S-F.

Fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) U-O-S -- (Meredith and Campbell, 1988).

Sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) U-O-S.

Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) FC-Y.

Gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) C-I-Y -- found sporadically in small numbers year-round throughout inshore waters, and in large numbers during migrations off the west side of Vancouver Island (Reeves and Mitchell, 1988).

Pinnipeds

Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) C-I-Y -- year-round resident, concentrated around breeding colonies in summer, dispersion throughout province from fall through spring (Bigg, 1988a).

California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*) C-L-I-Y -- rare in summer, seasonal visitor from the south, does not breed in B.C. (Bigg, 1988b).

Northern fur seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*) C-O-Y -- does not breed in B.C., largest numbers January through June (Kajimura and Loughlin, 1988).

Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) C-I-Y -- year-round resident.

Elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*) U-Y -- usually only single animals sighted. Does not breed in B.C..

Ribbon seal (*Phoca fasciata*) H-A -- normal range is in Bering and Okhotsk Seas, but one record off California (Roest, 1964) makes strays possible in B.C.

Otters

Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) FC-L-I-Y -- two year-round colonies on the west coast of Vancouver Island; occasional strays from Victoria to the Queen Charlottes.

River otter (*Lutra canadensis*) C-I-Y -- year-round resident, largely terrestrial but often found in marine environment.

To assist us in updating this list, please submit records of any of these species to the authors. All records will be acknowledged in any resulting publications. We thank Mike Bigg for assistance with status assignments.

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Authors' address:

Box 6244, Victoria, B.C. Canada V8P 5L5