



Marine Education Poster Contest 2010

Sponsored by Blue Lagoon Island & Marine Vendors from Nassau

Dolphin Encounters-Project BEACH

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Strangers In Our Backyard

Mysterious Wildlife In The Bahamas

Every day some famous adventurer discovers a new plant or animal that is unique and beautiful in some deep underwater home or in a far away jungle. Well, we are going on an Ocean Safari to meet some of the "strangers" that live right here in The Bahamas that most people know very little about.

Some of these new friends may seem weird, but they all share our country with us and make it unique and beautiful in their own special way. This year, we will explore the wild natural history of the Manta Ray, the Sperm Whale, the Humpback Whale and the Bahamian Rock Iguana.



**Contest Deadline:
April 30th, 2010**

The Manta Ray

The first stop on our aquatic adventure puts us face to face with the **Manta Ray** (*Manta birostris*) – also known as the **devil fish**. It is the largest member of the **ray family** and can grow as large as 25 ft and weigh up to 5 tons!



They have a short tail with no stinger and swim at or near the surface, propelling themselves by flapping their pectoral fins and, at times, leaping or somersaulting out

of the water. Mantas feed on plankton, fish larvae and the like, filtering the water passing through their sieve-like gills as they swim. Large sharks and in some circumstances killer whales, are manta's main predators.



This species can be found around many of the Bahamian islands in small groups, including a resident group that hangs out around Rose Island.



Mantas display curiosity around humans, and swim among divers. With no real teeth or stinger they pose no danger to anyone but

plankton. There are several individuals in aquariums worldwide and they are so gentle that several dive companies offer Manta-dive trips to encounter these giants.

The Sperm Whale

As we leave the warm near shore world of the manta we continue our exploration into deeper waters. Here we find the **Sperm Whale** (*Physeter macrocephalus*) which is the **largest toothed whale** in the world with adult males growing up to 60 feet and weighing over 60 tons!



nursery pods, taking advantage of our clear waters with deep drop offs while raising their young.

Sperm Whales have the largest brain of any animal and their heart can weigh up to 270 pounds (that's equal to about 2 adult people!). With an enormous square head, beady eyes and rack of gigantic teeth,

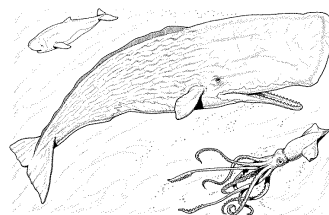
the sperm whale can make a frightening impression. Its battle, however, is not with people, but with the **giant squid**, its primary food source though they also eat fish, octopus and stingrays.



Over a period of 200 years, over a million sperm whales were killed to obtain products such as **spermaceti** (a wax produced in the whale's head), whale oil and ambergris. Spermaceti was used to make many items, such as candles, soap, cosmetics and machine oil. Protected since 1966, the population has now recovered and is estimated at several hundred thousand whales worldwide!



Adult female sperm whales are regulars to the Bahamas and are found here year-round in



To pursue a meal, this marine mammal may plunge to depths of almost a mile while holding their breath for up to an hour during a hunt. An adult sperm whale can eat up to a ton of food each day!

The Humpback Whale



If we are talking about whales, we must stop to investigate the mysterious **Humpback Whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). This animal sings amazing songs and is known as the acrobat of the ocean, slapping and **breaching** on the water with up to 50 tons of whale!



Humpbacks live in pods and both male and female whales vocalize, however only males

produce the long, loud, complex "songs" for which they are famous. Each song usually lasts from 10 to 20 minutes.

These whales grow to be about 52 feet long, weighing 30-50 tons. How big is that? Well, the heart of an average size humpback weighs about 430 pounds—that's about 3 adult people! "Humpback" describes the animals back as it arches above the water just before a dive.

All baleen whales are **filter feeders** that eat tiny krill,

plankton, and small fish such as herring, mackerel, and capelin. Humpbacks are **gulpers**, gulping a mouthful of plankton or fish as they rise to the surface. They force the water out through **baleen plates**, trapping the food on



the inside of their mouth. An average Humpback will eat around 5,000 tons of food each day during the 120-day

long feeding season in cold polar waters. These whales then migrate to warm waters to breed and give birth, living off their fat reserves for the season.

During the 20th century, an around 200,000 Humpbacks were hunted and killed, reducing the global population by over 90% and northern populations were estimated as low as 700 whales. In 1966 Humpbacks were protected by the International Whaling Commission and since then have miraculously rebounded to nearly 80,000 individuals worldwide.

The Bahamian Rock Iguana



As we get out of the deep, cold water it's a good idea to warm up and catch some sun. Walking up the beach is a **Bahamian Rock Iguana** (*Cyclura*) who has the same idea as us...sunbathing!

Three species live within our nation with seven sub-species present. The iguanas are found on Andros, Acklins, San Salvador, Mayaguana, and in the Exuma Cays.

Unfortunately, all are **threatened** with total populations equaling only around 5,000 and still declining.

Living up to 40 years and growing to lengths of 5-6 feet, the B.R. Iguana is mainly an **herbivore**, eating leaves, flowers and fruits from over 100 different plant species. On rare occasions, they may

also eat insect larvae, crabs, slugs, dead birds and fungi.

On Andros, wild hogs, feral cats and dogs severely threaten iguanas. Wild goats have also been known to compete with the iguanas for food. All other B.R. Iguanas are restricted to small, isolated islands where predators do not pose a threat. Even so, there is a continuous threat to all

populations of iguanas of being harvested by people for food and for the pet trade, and a potential threat of falling prey to introduced predators, such as dogs and feral cats. In addition natural disasters, such as hurricanes are a constant threat.



Marine Debris Threatens Our Bahamian Strangers!

Although locally we don't hunt whales or iguanas for food anymore, they still face many human-caused dangers in their environments. Many of us think that the ocean is so big that it cannot be harmed or that our little bit of trash does not matter. Nothing is further from the truth. Marine debris causes serious harm to ocean animals, humans AND our environment.

Marine debris is trash that's found in or around the water. The most common types of marine debris are: cigarettes, food wrappers, caps and lids, plastic bottles, plastic utensils (forks, knives and spoons) and aluminum cans, glass bottles, straws, fast-food containers



A manta ray drags fishing net along.

and fishing nets. If these "top-ten" most wanted of trash criminals were disposed of properly, our beaches would be 82% cleaner!

Approximately 100,000 marine mammals, turtles, birds, fish and crustaceans die each year due to marine debris, either by **entanglement** or **ingestion** (eating). Entanglement causes wounds that can

lead to infections, loss of limbs, strangulation or suffocation. Trash wrapped around an animal can impair the animal's ability to swim, hunt and escape predators which usually results in death. When animals eat trash, it can lead to starvation or malnutrition. If an object has sharp edges it can damage the airway or stomach of the animal leading to infection or pain.



Dead Beached Sperm Whales

Marine debris is one of the most solvable problems facing society today! Some responsibility falls on the government and private organizations, but each person doing his or her part remains one of the best ways to tackle pollution. By properly disposing of our trash and practicing the "3 R's: **Reduce**, **Reuse** and **Recycle**" trash in our communities can be a thing of the past. An important step to success is simply to NOT LITTER!

So the next time you are on a safari enjoying the beauty of the Bahamas, remember the animals that you may never see live here too. They don't want to be strangers, but neighbors that share and enjoy our world too!