

The Northern Right Whale, South Carolina's New State Symbol

Because of the hard work by a group of school children at Alice Drive Elementary School in Sumter, the Northern Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) was named South Carolina's state migratory mammal by Act Number 58 in early June 2009.

Right whales can be seen off the coast of South Carolina from late-November through January during the breeding and calving season. The adults range from 35 to 55 feet long and can weigh over 100 tons (with females larger than the males). The newborns, in comparison, are 13-20 feet long and weigh approximately 1 ton. In 2008, 23 calves were documented and in 2009 39 newborns were seen!

Although the right whale has been protected since the 1930s, this is the most endangered whale species in the world, with only an estimated 400 individuals. Commercial hunting of right whales has been banned for nearly 100 years, but many were killed during this time. They were called "right whales" because early whalers thought these whales were the "right" or "correct" ones to hunt for three reasons: they typically floated (rather than sinking) when killed, they would often swim within sight of the shore where scouts could easily see them, and because they were slow swimmers.

Today, they continue their ancient migrations along the east coast of the United States and Canada. Unfortunately this puts them in some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. As a result, the leading cause of death is now ship strikes while the second most common cause is entanglement in fishing gear.

These animals are easily distinguished from other whales because of the callosities (uniquely shaped areas of roughened skin that are often covered with barnacles) on their heads, a broad back that doesn't have a fin, and the distinctive wide V-shaped plumes that they spray.

This fall, when you go to a South Carolina beach, watch the watery horizon for a while and try to spot a right whale. They often swim fairly close to shore and they are highly acrobatic, frequently jumping from the water and slapping their tails.

P. S. Here's What You Should Do If You See a Northern Right Whale From a Boat

- Slow your vessel to avoid the whale(s)
- Do not approach the right whale. It is illegal to approach a right whale within 500 yards
- Record the latitude and longitude of the whales, or position in regard to buoys
- Report the sighting to the Coast Guard via VHF Channel 16

To become involved with the Northern Right Whale Monitoring Program, [click here](#).
(Link to <http://www.mrcirl.org/whale/whale.html>)