

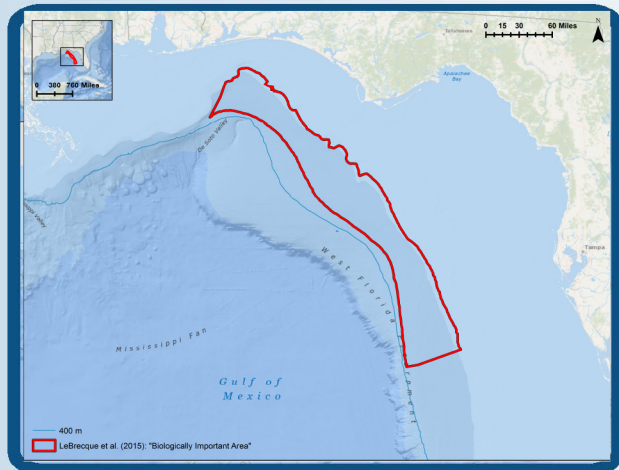


# Gulf of Mexico Bryde's Whale

(Pronounced "BROO-dus")



Scientists believe that there are fewer than 100 Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales, making them one of the most endangered whales in the world. This estimate accounts for uncertainty about their existence in the southern Gulf of Mexico, as well as in Mexican and Cuban waters, where there has been less survey effort to look for the whales. The abundance estimate used for the management of the Bryde's whale stock in the northern Gulf of Mexico is 33 whales. Recently, Duke University researchers estimated abundance to be 44 individuals based on the averages of 23 years of survey data. The Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales' small population size, life history characteristics, extremely limited distribution, and vulnerability to existing threats lead to their high risk of extinction. Recovery of the species is dependent upon the protection of each remaining whale.



Current known distribution of the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale.

The Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales are the only year-round baleen whale in the Gulf of Mexico. They are genetically distinct from the other two recognized subspecies of Bryde's whales worldwide, Eden's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni edeni*) and Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni brydei*). While Bryde's whales are found all around the world, the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale are only located in a small area along the De Soto Canyon shelf break in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. Despite dedicated surveys to search for Bryde's whales in the continental shelf and oceanic waters of the southeast Atlantic and northern Gulf of Mexico, for the past 20 years they have primarily been found in this very small area. However, historical whaling records suggest that their range was much broader, encompassing the north-central and southern Gulf of Mexico.

## Help Protect Gulf of Mexico Bryde's Whales:

**Due to their small population size and restricted geographic range, Bryde's whale sightings may be rare; however, if you see a Bryde's whale, follow these recommended guidelines:**

- **View responsibly from at least 100 yards away.**
- **Operate watercraft at a slow, safe speed where Bryde's whales are known to occur.**
- **Move away slowly if a Bryde's whale approaches you.**
- **Report dead, injured or entangled Bryde's whales to 1-877 WHALE HELP (1-877-942-5343).**

## Threats

The species' small population size and restricted range make these whales extremely vulnerable to any threats such that any human caused deaths can have population-level consequences. The most significant threats to Bryde's whales, in combination with their small population size and restricted range, are energy exploration and development, oil spills and response, vessel strikes, anthropogenic noise, and fisheries entanglement. These threats could be devastating for the small population of Bryde's whale living in the Gulf of Mexico.

While Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), NOAA Fisheries proposed to list these whales as 'endangered' under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This listing would increase efforts to protect and restore the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale population.

# Gulf of Mexico Bryde's Whale

Science, Service, Stewardship

*Below are known facts about Bryde's whales worldwide.; there is still much to learn about the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale, but specific information we do know about this subspecies is marked with an asterisk (\*).*

## Identification

- There is no apparent morphological (body/structure) difference between Bryde's whales in the Gulf of Mexico and those worldwide.\*
- Have mouthfuls of baleen which are large, dark grey to black flexible plates with white bristles.\* Bryde's whales have 250–350 short plates per side that are about 16 inches long.
- Adults are up to 41 feet in length\* and can weigh up to 30 tons. Females slightly larger than males.
- Sleek dark body with slender and pointed flippers.\*
- Uniformly dark gray on top with pale to pink belly, some pale blotches.\*
- Moderately pointed, flat rostrum with three prominent ridges located in front of the blowhole\* and both lower lips are dark.
- 40-70 long ventral throat grooves that extend past the navel.
- Dorsal fin is pointed and strongly hooked\*; it is located about two-thirds back on body. Trailing edge is often ragged.
- Columnar or bushy blow that is about 10-13 feet in height.

blowhole and ridges



flat rostrum



pointed & hooked dorsal fin



## Behavior

- Sometimes "curious" and may approach vessels.\*
- Occur singly or in small groups (average group size of 2)\* but may form larger, loose groups associated with feeding.
- Use baleen plates to filter small animals from seawater. Use different methods to feed, including lunging dives\*, and creating bubble nets.
- Do not feed at or near the surface but are thought to feed just at or above the sea floor.\* In general, feed in the water column on schooling fish such as anchovy, sardine, mackerel and herring, and small crustaceans; these prey are found in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Consume an estimated 1,320-1,450 pounds of food per day, which is about 4% of their body weight.
- Spend majority of the time (day and night) within 50 feet of the surface.\*
- Often surface at a steep angle, showing a large portion of their head, rolling sharply, and arching back.
- Do not show flukes when diving.
- Regularly dive for about 5-15 minutes (max of 20 min) after 4-7 blows at the surface.

## Biology

- Sexually mature at around 9 years.
- Produce a single calf every 2-3 years.\*
- Gestation is 10–12 months.
- Calves nurse for about 12 months.
- At birth, calves are approximately 11 feet long.

**For more information about Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales, visit <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov>**



### About NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

We are dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, enforcement, and habitat conservation. NOAA Fisheries is a leading voice for commercial and recreational fisheries and continues to focus its efforts on sustaining our marine resources. Visit <http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov> for more information.