

BELUGA

Lifespan: : 35 to 50 years in the wild (up to 70–80 years according to some biological studies).

Weight: 450 to 1,600 kg (males are significantly larger and heavier than females).

Body Measures: 3 to 5.5 meters in length; newborns measure approximately 1.5 meters.

Body temperature: Around 96.8°F to 98.6°F (36°C to 37°C), typical for large marine mammals; they maintain their core heat using a thick layer of blubber up to 10–13 cm deep.

TAXONOMY & ANATOMY

Unlike most cetaceans, the beluga
Unlike most cetaceans, this white whale features seven unfused cervical vertebrae, allowing it to turn its head laterally. Its forehead features a flexible, lipid-filled "melon" used to focus echolocation sounds. Adults display striking all-white skin, while calves possess dull gray-brown feathers or skin. It lacks a dorsal fin, which is replaced by a tough, low dorsal ridge.

SC. CLASSIFICATION

This massive marine mammal belongs to the **Mammalia** class, falls under the **Artiodactyla** order (suborder **Cetacea**), and is a member of the **Monodontidae** family (scientific name: ***Delphinapterus leucas***).

HABITAT

This highly resilient marine mammal thrives across the icy arctic and sub-arctic waters, coastal bays, and shallow estuaries of the far north. It prefers open leads in ice-covered seas and shallow coastal areas where it can easily find food. It avoids deep oceanic open areas and thick, dense ice shelves that would restrict its ability to surface for air.

DIET

The species operates primarily as an opportunistic benthic carnivore, feeding on various ocean-floor creatures. It consumes over 100 different species, including cod, salmon, herring, squid, octopuses, crabs, and marine worms. To aid in catching prey without chewing, it uses powerful suction to swallow fish and invertebrates completely



INTRODUCTION

The beluga reigns as the undisputed storyteller and acrobat of the icy seas. Incapable of camouflage at birth due to its dark grayish-brown color, this whale gradually acquires a striking, pure white skin as an adult, allowing it to blend seamlessly with Arctic ice. Lacking a dorsal fin but gifted with a remarkably flexible neck and a highly sophisticated echolocation system, it combines ancient evolutionary traits with bizarre vocal adaptations, fascinating researchers with its social intelligence and resilience in Earth's harshest cold environments.





ETHOLOGY AND TEMPERAMENT

This highly social mammal lives in nomadic groups called **pods**, consisting of a few individuals (2–15) to massive migratory herds numbering thousands during summer river gatherings. It displays a curious, playful, and highly cooperative temperament, foraging together and frequently rubbing against each other. They communicate constantly through an immense repertoire of sounds, earning them the nickname "**canaries of the sea**." To keep the pod safe, they rely on coordinated group movements and seek refuge in narrow ice channels where large predators like killer whales or polar bears cannot easily hunt them.

FUN FACT

The beluga is **the only cetaceo capable of changing its facial expressions** and moving its lips, thanks to unique facial muscles and the high flexibility of its forehead melon. Additionally, it undergoes an actual **annual skin molt**: every summer, thousands of belugas gather in shallow, gravelly riverbeds to rub themselves against smooth pebbles, scraping off the old, yellowed outer layer of skin to reveal a fresh, snow-white coat beneath.

BREEDING SEASON

Reproduction occurs mostly during the **spring months** (between March and May) when mature males form large bachelor groups to court females. The gestation period lasts about **14 to 15 months**, concluding the following summer when females enter the warm, protected waters of shallow estuaries to give birth to a single calf. The mother nurses the calf for about two years, and the young whale remains closely attached to her for a long period, learning the traditional family migratory routes.

