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K - Killer Whale: *Orcinus orca*

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Publisher Summary

This chapter discusses the characteristics, taxonomy, distribution, abundance, and ecology of the killer whale or *Orcinus orca*. With its striking black and white markings and cosmopolitan range, the killer whale, or orca, is one of the most easily recognized and widely distributed of all cetaceans and is unlikely to be confused with any other species. It is a large dolphin, attaining maximum body lengths of 9.0 m in males and 7.7 m in females. Maximum measured weights are 6600 kg for a 7.65-m male and 4700 kg for a 6.58-m female. In addition to sexual dimorphism in size, mature males develop disproportionately larger appendages than females. This includes the pectoral flippers, tail flukes (the tips of which curl downward in males), and dorsal fin, which is erect in shape and may attain a height of 1.8 m in males. At birth, neonate killer whales are approximately 2–2.5 m long and weigh approximately 200 kg. The killer whale is second only to humans as the most widely distributed mammal in the world. It has a cosmopolitan distribution, being found in all oceans and most seas, but is most common in coastal, temperate waters, particularly in areas of high marine productivity.

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