

Berardius

Sato's beaked whale — Berardius minimus Yamada, Kitamura, & Matsuishi, 2019

Baird's beaked whale — Berardius bairdii Stejneger, 1883

BEAKED WHALES (Ziphiidae)



Mysteries of the Deep

Oregon State University
Marine Mammal

Despite being collectively abundant, globally widespread, and remarkably diverse, beaked whales (family Ziphiidae) are the least known large animals on the planet. Named for their extended, dolphin-like beak, 24 species in 6 genera are currently recognized, representing more than one-quarter of the 93 known species of cetaceans in the world. Two new species were described in the past 5 years alone, and there are probably more left to discover. They live in deep, offshore waters where they are master divers, in some cases plunging 3,000 meters (1.8 miles) for over 3.5 hours. They feed on small, deepwater squids and fishes, using suction feeding; as such, they don't need teeth, and females of most species remain toothless their entire lives. Most males, however, retain a single tooth in each lower jaw that is enlarged for use as a tusk in jousting matches for access to breeding females. The size and location of these teeth is species specific, ranging from tiny to massive and from the tip of the lower jaw to halfway back. Within groups, adult males can usually be identified by the long, linear tooth-rake scars that they inflict on each other. These scars range from relatively light scratches to deep furrows, depending on the size and location of the teeth and how aggressively the individual species wield them. Beaked whales spend very little time at the surface, where killer whales and large sharks are the main threat, and live the bulk of their lives in total darkness. Almost everything known about the feeding ecology and behavior of most species has been gleaned from dead animals stranded on beaches; several species have never been identified alive in the wild. For the most part, the lives of beaked whales remain deep, dark secrets.













