



## Reading Handout: Whale Scientific Classification

The information below shows the scientific classification of whales that still exist today.

**KINGDOM Animalia**  
**PHYLUM Chordata**  
**SUBPHYLUM Vertebrata**  
**CLASS Mammalia**

Class Mammalia includes organisms that are endothermic (warm-blooded), have hair, breathe air with lungs, have live-birth, and nurse their young milk. They can be distinguished from reptiles and birds by the possession of hair, three middle ear bones, mammary glands (produce milk), and a neocortex (a region of the brain).

Mammals include the largest animals on the planet, whales, as well as some of the most intelligent, such as elephants, primates and cetaceans. Mammals range in size from the 1.5 inch bumblebee bat to the 100 foot blue whale.

The class Mammalia has two subclasses:

**SUBCLASS Prototheria** (monotremes: egg layers - echidnas and the platypus)

**SUBCLASS Theriiformes** (live-bearing mammals)

Whales are live-bearing mammals and are in a group called Cetacea. They can also be broken into two major groups:

**Mysticeti** (baleen whales)

Examples: blue whale, humpback whale, gray whale, fin whale, etc.

Baleen is a sieve-like structure in the upper jaw used to filter plankton from the water.

**Odontoceti** (toothed whales)

Examples: dolphins, porpoises, killer whale, sperm whale, etc.

They have sharp teeth for hunting fishes, other mammals, and squid.

**FAMILY** (approximately 14)

**GENUS and SPECIES** (approximately 88)

