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## **Bitter-Cold Bowhead**

The Bowhead Whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) is exclusively found in the Arctic Circle. This marine mammal was first documented in 1758 by Carl Linnaeus.

Found only in the northern hemisphere, these whales prefer the polar waters throughout the Arctic Circle. They live along the edge of the pack ice. Seasonal migrations can be observed and occur with the formation and movement of ice.

Bowheads are born in the spring and summer after a 13 to 14 month gestation period. The newborn calf is 4 to 4.5 meters in length and doubles in length in one year. It reaches sexual maturity at about 15 meters and the maximum length is a little over 18 meters. It is estimated that they weight between 60 to 100 tons as full grown adults. The flukes width can be almost half the total body length (about 9 meters!). The head can be about one third of the total body length. There is no dorsal fin, hump or ridge on their backs.

The bowhead whale is smooth. They have no callosities or parasitic growths present on their bodies; like other large baleen whales. They have a body that is black with a white patch on its chin; each whale has a different pattern, similar to a finger print in humans. Claves are born a light grey color and darken as they get older; the older an animal is the darker the skin appears.

Since they live in the arctic, they have adapted to making their own breathing wholes in ice by using their heads to break ice up to 30 cm thick. They are seen at the surface to breath every 1 to 3 minutes and are identified by a V-shaped blow pattern.

Feeding occurs at or below the surface, with some scientists observing them feeding near the sea floor. They have also been seen moving at the surface of the water with their mouth open and slowly skimming for food. Their diet consists of krill and other small invertebrates and eat about two tons of food daily.

The biggest threat to bowhead whales are humans. Native Alaskans, or Inupates do not hunt them during the spring and summer out of respect to make sure that they survive for future generations. Regulations are in place to prevent over hunting.