

REEF TEACH TIMES

Edition 12 June 2011

WHATS NEW: We have given our show a face lift. New photos and for the first time video has been added. Now, together with the real life specimens of coral and fish the show really brings the Reef to life. Also check out our new look website with loads of information: www.reefteach.com.au. You can also follow us on Twitter: @reefteach.

...Whales? They're Back!

The start of winter is a very exciting time on the Great Barrier Reef with the arrival of the whales. The Reef is home to nearly 30 species of marine mammals. The whales of particular interest at this time of year are the Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) and the Dwarf Minke Whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata* subsp.).

Humpback whales (HBW) are the fifth largest animal on the planet, growing up to 18m in length and weighing up to 40 tonnes! They have the largest flippers of all the whales - up to 5m in length! HBW spend their summers in the cold waters off Antarctica, feeding mainly on krill (a small shrimp-like animal), returning to the Great Barrier Reef and Coral Sea between June and September to mate, calf and socialise. Males are renowned for their singing during the breeding season.



Interestingly the songs of HBW is equivalent to a language, songs of different populations of HBW differ from area to area. HBW are exciting whales to watch as they can be very active, whale watchers can see high energy breaches, lob-tailing, flipper-slapping, together with calmer but still majestic behaviours such as, fluking, blowing, and spy-hopping (described at right). Visitors should keep an eye out for HBW throughout the winter months.

Dwarf Minke Whales: Very little is known about them. They seem to be more closely related to the northern hemisphere Minke Whale rather than the southern hemisphere Minke Whale. They have yet to be given their own name so currently they are labelled *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* (subsp). Despite them being seemingly closer cousins to the northern hemisphere specie of Minke Whales, they have only been found in the southern hemisphere.

They are small for whales with the largest recorded reaching a maximum of 7.8m (about 2m smaller than their larger cousins) and weighing about 5-6 tons. They have a characteristic white flash extending over their shoulder and onto their flipper, white underside and darker top side. Often a wispy white saddle can be seen extending across their back. Researchers use these patterns to ID individuals. See the **Minke Whale Project** (www.minkewhaleproject.org) for how researchers use the ID information. During the months June and July these beautiful whales seem to be very inquisitive of boats, this means tourists and boat crew can get once in a lifetime encounters with these whales. If you're lucky enough to have a Minke encounter... please donate any photos, videos and information to the Minke Whale Project's, the project relies purely on the tourism industry to assist them with their research. **Send your images to:** Susan.Sobtzick@jcu.edu.au with details of the date and time they were taken, the boat you were on and the location (e.g. reef name or GPS coordinates). Who knows... your photos might help to make an important discovery!

Go to our website (www.reefteach.com.au) to see which companies are allowed to swim with the whales.



Thanks to Matt Curnock at the Minke Whale Project for these beautiful images!

For all bookings/enquiries please contact (07) 4031 7794 or email learn@reefteach.com.au

"With learning comes appreciation."

REEF TEACH: 2nd Floor, Mainstreet Arcade, 85 Lake Street, Cairns. Tel: (07) 4031 7794

REEF TEACH

18:30—20:30

Tuesday – Saturday

\$18 adults, \$9 child (14 & under)
\$45 families (2ad, 2ch)

To learn more about dwarf minke whales go to:
www.minkewhale.org

www.minkewhaleproject.org

Guide to Whale and Dolphin Behaviours

BLOWING expensively exhaling air from their blowholes.
BREACHING leaping out of the water head- first & falling back with a splash. **FLIPPER SLAPPING** rolling onto one side and slapping the water with one flipper. **FLUKING** raising tail flukes out of the water before diving. **LOB TAILING** slapping tail flukes against the water, sometimes repeatedly. **PIROUETTING** spinning upright in the water like a dancer, observed in minke whales. **PORPOISING** swimming swiftly at the surface, moving in and out of the water. **SPY HOPPING** raising their heads out of the water and looking around.

Cairns Underwater Film Festival 2011

*Over \$30 000 in Prizes

*Photo Competition deadline 20 July 2011

*Cairns Civic Theatre
13 August 2011

For more info go to:
www.cairnsunderwaterfilmfestival.com



www.reefteach.com.au