

The Giant of the Deep: The Blue Whale

A Commentary to Accompany the Blue Planet : Blue Whale

Dwarfed by the vast expanse of the open ocean, glides the largest animal that has ever lived on our planet: a blue whale. Thirty metres long and weighing over 200 tonnes, it's far bigger than even the biggest dinosaur. Its tongue weighs as much as an elephant, and some of its blood vessels are so wide, a man could swim down them.

Swimming alongside this majestic creature and looking into one of its eyes, one gains an overwhelming feeling of real intelligence - a whale will examine you carefully, although it can only view in monochrome (shades of grey). This gentle leviathan cannot, as one may presume, live indefinitely below the waves: it is a mammal and thus needs air to breathe. There are few more awesome sights than that of the blue whale breaking through the surface, expelling a plume of water from its blow-hole.

Although the whale's immense size may suggest slow, ponderous movement, its streamlining, close to perfection, enables it to cruise at 20 knots - one of the fastest creatures in the sea. It is a fact that the ocean's largest inhabitant feeds almost exclusively on one of the smallest - krill. This single whale can consume 40 million of them in a day.

Despite its enormous size, we know very little about this giant of the deep. Its migration routes are a mystery and we have absolutely no idea where it travels to breed. This animal is a dramatic reminder about how much we still have to learn about the ocean and the creatures that live there.