



## Whaling Timeline

- c. 1000 C.E.** Basques begin hunting right whales in Bay of Biscay region, the first true commercial whaling operation. Over the ensuing centuries, they expand slowly northward and westward, arriving off Labrador around 1540.
- 1611** England's Muscovy Company sends two whaling ships to the newly-discovered Arctic island of Spitsbergen to hunt bowhead whales. By 1613, the waters around Spitsbergen are choked with whaling ships. By the late seventeenth century, Dutch whalers alone send roughly 250 vessels and 18,000 men to the Arctic in search of bowheads.
- 1675** Yoriharu Wada begins organizing whaling crews in Taiji, Japan.
- 1712** Beginning of American commercial whaling, operating out of Nantucket in search of sperm whales.
- 1842** British explorer James Clark Ross, sailing off the Antarctic Peninsula, observes "a very great number of the largest-sized black whales," prompting interest in the prospects for an Antarctic whaling industry.
- 1863** Norwegian whaling pioneer Svend Foyn launches the *Spes et Fides*, the first truly steam-powered whaling ship.
- 1868** Foyn perfects the harpoon cannon.
- 1874** German whaling ship, the *Grönland*, heads south in search of the whales spied by Ross. It becomes the first steam ship to cross the Antarctic Circle, but fails to catch any whales.
- 1904** Norwegian Carl Anton Larsen establishes the first Antarctic whaling operation, at Grytviken on South Georgia. In its first twelve months, the company shoots 184 whales. Within ten years, South Georgia whalers kill 1,738 blue whales, 4,776 fin whales, and 21,894 humpback whales.
- 1909** First British Antarctic whaling station established on West Falkland Island.
- 1923** Larsen leads the *Sir James Clark Ross*, the first Antarctic factory ship, into the Ross Sea.
- 1924** The *Lancing*, the first modern factory ship equipped with a stern ramp, reaches the Antarctic.
- 1927** Whale kill for the Antarctic season: 13,775.
- 1929** Whale kill for the Antarctic season: 40,201.

- 1930** Thirty-eight factory ships and 184 catchers, mostly British and Norwegian, are operating in the Antarctic.
- 1931** Geneva Convention for the Regulation of Whaling is signed; the first international attempt to regulate the industry.  
That same year, an all-time record 29,410 blue whales are killed in the Antarctic.
- 1934** First Japanese factory ship, the *Tonan Maru*, heads to the Antarctic.
- 1937** International Agreement for the Regulation of Whaling is signed in London.  
The next season, 46,039 whales are killed in the Antarctic, the highest total ever.
- 1946** International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) is signed in Washington, D.C. Three years later, the IWC meets for the first time.
- 1964** Antarctic whalers are able to find and kill just twenty blue whales. The following year, the IWC protects the species from whaling.
- 1971** Greenpeace makes its first voyage, to Amchitka Island to protest nuclear testing.
- 1972** United Nations Conference on the Human Environment votes for a ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling.
- 1975** First Greenpeace anti-whaling voyage, confronting Soviet whalers in the North Pacific.
- 1979** IWC establishes Indian Ocean Sanctuary, and bans pelagic factory ship whaling for all species except minke.
- 1982** IWC establishes indefinite commercial whaling moratorium, to take effect from 1985/86 Antarctic season. Japan, Norway, Peru, and USSR file objections; Japan and Peru later withdraw their objections.
- 1987** Japanese factory ship *Nisshin Maru No. 3* and three catchers set out on first “scientific whaling” voyage in Antarctic, to kill up to 330 minke whales.
- 1989** During second “scientific whaling” voyage, the *Nisshin Maru No. 3* encounters the Greenpeace icebreaker *Gondwana*, which interferes with its actions for several days.
- 1991** MV *Greenpeace* leaves Singapore on 81-day voyage to intercept Japan’s Antarctic whaling fleet.
- 1992** French government proposes Southern Ocean Sanctuary; *Greenpeace* departs on second voyage to find Antarctic whalers.
- 1994** IWC adopts Southern Ocean Sanctuary; *Greenpeace* embarks on third Antarctic anti-whaling expedition.
- 1995** Japan increases quota for Antarctic “research” whaling from 330 to 440.
- 1996** Japan begins “research” whaling in the North Pacific.
- 1997** “Irish proposal” floated at IWC meeting in Monaco.

- 1998** Brazil floats idea for a South Atlantic whale sanctuary; Australia and New Zealand suggest a similar sanctuary in the South Pacific.
- 1999** *Arctic Sunrise* engages *Nisshin Maru* and catchers.
- 2000** Japan expands North Pacific “research” to include Bryde’s and sperm whales.
- 2001** *Arctic Sunrise* again engages Antarctic whaling fleet.
- 2002** Japan expands North Pacific hunt to include sei whales, and increases N. Pacific quota of minke whales. At the annual IWC meeting, Japan and allies initially deny bowhead quota to natives of Alaska and Russia. At a special meeting in England, the IWC apparently readmits Iceland in to IWC, with a reservation against the moratorium; somehow, non-member Iceland is itself allowed to cast the deciding vote.
- 2005** The Government of Japan announces massive increase of “research” whaling quota in the Antarctic, to 935 minke whales annually. Beginning in 2006, the catch will also include endangered fin whales; and, from 2007, endangered humpback whales.
- 2005-6** The Greenpeace ships *Esperanza* and *Arctic Sunrise* interfere with the whaling fleet in the Antarctic.
- 2006** Iceland returns to commercial whaling, killing seven endangered fin whales.
- 2007** The *Esperanza* returns to the Antarctic in search of the whaling fleet.
- 2007** The International Whaling Commission meets on US soil for the first time in 18 years, in Anchorage, Alaska, in May.

*Adapted from “The Whaling Season: An Inside Account of the Struggle to Stop Commercial Whaling” by Kieran Mulvaney (Island Press, 2003).*



**Defending the Whales**  
[whales.greenpeace.org/us](http://whales.greenpeace.org/us)