

Japan Spring whaling haul at record low

June 6 2013



Illustration of a minke whale and its calf. Japanese whalers hunting the mammals in the northwestern Pacific caught a record-low 34 minke whales this Spring, the fisheries agency said Thursday, blaming bad weather.

Japanese whalers hunting the mammals in the northwestern Pacific caught a record-low 34 minke whales this Spring, the fisheries agency said Thursday, blaming bad weather.

The whaling, conducted in the name of "scientific research", took place from April 18 to June 3 and netted 17 male and 17 female minke. The catch is the lowest since Tokyo started the programme in 2003, the agency said.

"The weather was very bad this year, often with thick fog or very strong

wind," said an agency official.

Japan's whale hunts, especially its annual Southern Ocean expedition, have long drawn criticism from activists and foreign governments, but Tokyo defends the practice saying eating whale is part of the country's culinary tradition.

It says whales are studied as part of a bid by Japan's whaling research institute to prove their populations can sustain [commercial whaling](#).

Many of the whales this Spring were slightly smaller than last year, the official said.

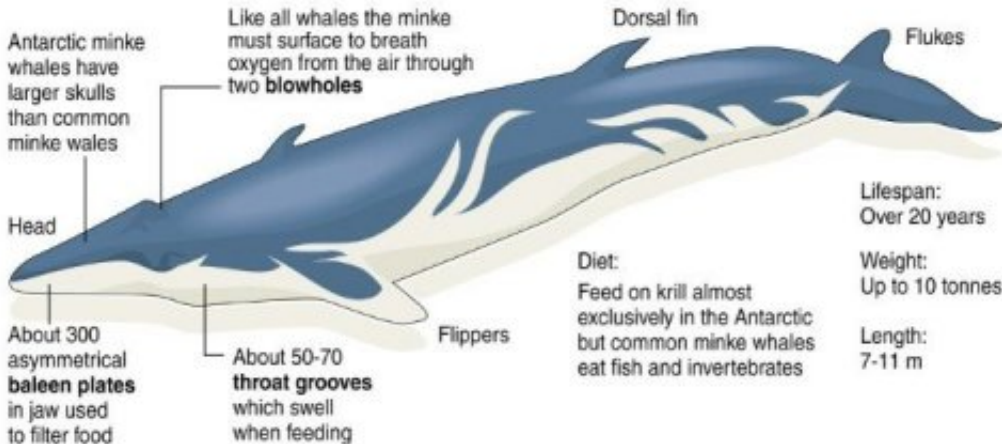
Stomach samples from 22 of the creatures caught in Sendai Bay showed their diet was dominated by young sand eels, rather than mature sand eels as in the past, the group said, according to Kyodo News.

Minke whale

Smallest of the great baleen whale family, highly acrobatic and a fast swimmer, main target of Japanese hunters

Two known species:

- ▶ Antarctic minke whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*)
- ▶ Northern or common minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)



Main threats:

- ▶ Whaling - nearly 100,000 minke whales have been caught in expeditions in the Antarctic, according to IUCN*

A loophole in 1986 IWC** moratorium allows killing of whales for "scientific research". Japan conducts annual hunts in the Antarctic based on this loophole

- ▶ Bycatches in fishing nets and traps
- ▶ Habitat disturbance

Behaviour:

- ▶ Highly acrobatic and often active on water surface, commonly seen to:
 - Breach or leap out of water
 - Skyhop or raise heads vertically out of water
 - Dive by arching and exposing their backs and body during high rolls above the surface
- ▶ Fast swimmers, can go up to 29-34 kph
- ▶ Known to vocalise and use low-frequency sounds to communicate with each other

Source: IUCN/SeaShepherd/IWC/NOAA/ProjectMinke.org/JapanFisheriesAgency/Marinebio.org

AFP

Graphic fact file on the minke whale, main target of the Japanese whale catch. Hunters in the northwestern Pacific caught a record-low 34 minke whales this spring, the fisheries agency said Thursday.

The whaling mission in the [Southern Ocean](#) this year also logged a "record low" catch of the [mammals](#), with the government blaming "unforgivable sabotage" by activists.

Activists charge Tokyo's "research whaling" is cover for commercial

whaling that is banned under an international agreement.

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