

## WHAT'S IN THE WHALE'S MOUTH?

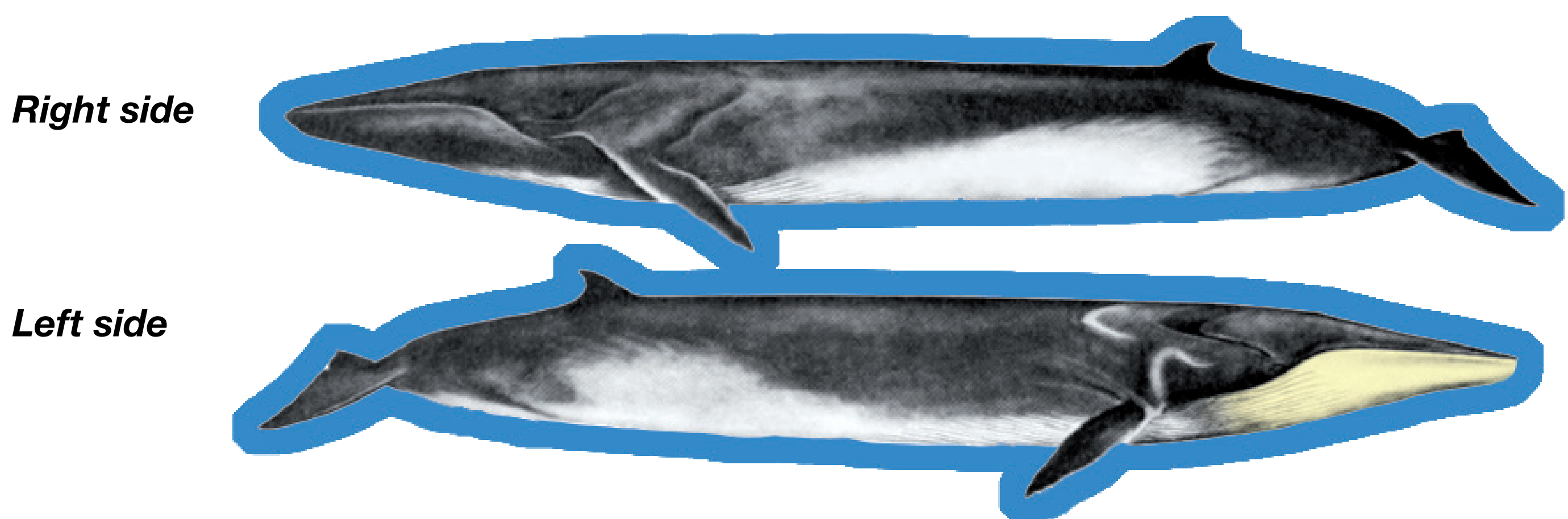
The Common whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) has no teeth, but at each side of the upper jaw there are 350-400 baleen plates which are dark horny lamellae of keratin (protein). Each baleen plate is about 30 cm wide and 76 cm long. Thanks to these, it filters large amounts of water, and swallows small plankton (Krill).

## WHAT IS THIS?

The skull of a Common whale (3,72 m long, 1,80 m broad and weighing about 500 kg) belongs to a male who died in April 1973 following the collision with the bow of a ship in the Gulf of Genoa.

After the Blue whale, the common whale is the largest mammal on the planet: at birth it measures about 6 m in length and weighs 2 tons. It would appear that it can live 90 years or more. The Mediterranean hosts over 3000 specimens.

Its most unusual feature is the asymmetrical colouring of the lower jaw: it is white or creamy yellow on the right side, while on the left side it's a darker colour. This colouration extends up to the baleen and tongue and seems to help in the capture of prey.



## Did you know?

Recognizing them at sea is facilitated by their dimensions and by the characteristic almost 6 m high vertical cone-shaped sprout.