

From Hunting to Helping

by Kathiann M. Kowalski

- 1 Most countries no longer hunt whales. Instead, conservationists and scientists search for ways to help them. Yet the magnificent mammals still face major threats.
- 2 As America's whaling industry peaked in the 1850s, economic pressures began to squeeze the business. In 1859, the world's first oil well was drilled in Pennsylvania. Petroleum now competed with whale oil as a fuel. Then came the invention of the incandescent light bulb in 1879, which further reduced America's demand for whale oil.
- 3 Catastrophes at sea posed more problems. One of the worst events occurred in 1871, when more than 32 whaling ships became trapped in the Arctic ice. The captains of those vessels made the difficult decision to abandon their ships in order to survive. Packed into the ships' many smaller whaleboats, 1,219 people made the treacherous journey through semifrozen Arctic waters before they were completely iced over. Other whaleships picked them up about 90 miles from Icy Cape, Alaska. No lives were lost, but about \$1.6 million in property was left behind, which would be worth more than \$30 million today. Rebuilding that many ships was costly, and other industries looked like safer investments.
- 4 Even though America's whaling industry shrank, hunting continued worldwide. Advances in technology made it easier to kill whales. But those "innovations" resulted in overhunting, and some species faced possible extinction. The practice wasn't sustainable.
- 5 Under a 1931 international agreement, 22 countries agreed to stop the commercial hunting of bowhead whales. Despite these efforts, by the late 1930s, hunters still killed



- more than 50,000 whales per year. In 1946, a treaty established the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which over the second half of the century instituted species-specific bans and a ban on commercial hunting and set up two whale sanctuaries. Yet in total, scientists estimate that about 2.9 billion whales died worldwide during the 20th century.
- 6 Today, 89 countries are members of the IWC. Some populations of whales, such as humpback and bowhead whales, have begun to recover, but others remain at risk. Only a few hundred North Pacific and North Atlantic right whales remain alive today. Blue whales number only a few thousand. Gray whales have recovered in much of the eastern North Pacific, but the IWC estimates that fewer than 130 are in the western Pacific. Despite efforts by the IWC to regulate whaling, several species of whales remain on the endangered list.
 - 7 Despite the IWC's ban, whale hunting hasn't entirely stopped. Iceland and Norway have objected to the ban and continue hunting. Japan uses a clause in the convention agreement, claiming the whales are taken for scientific research in order to avoid the ban. In 2014, the International Court of Justice found that Japan's "research" claims didn't justify its killings. Nonetheless, Japan still hunts.

- 8 Fishing kills whales even when they're not the intended catch. Large commercial nets designed to scoop up fish sometimes trap whales too. This is called bycatch. Whales need air to breathe, just as people do. But too often, whales can't surface while snagged in a net, so they drown. Even if the whale escapes, the drag from tangled fishing gear can exhaust or disorient it and result in its death.
- 9 Fishing also depletes whales' food supply. Some whales eat krill, for example. But as commercial fisheries catch more and more of the tiny crustaceans for fish food and nutrient supplements, the large quantities of krill in the ocean shrink, and the whales have less food.
- 10 Just as car crashes kill people on land, ships kill whales at sea. Most species of great whales are injured or killed by shipping activities called ship strikes, which is when a ship collides with a whale.
- 11 Noise—from shipping, oil and gas development, military sonar, and other human activities—also harms whales. Noise interferes with the way whales communicate with each other, through their songs. Noise can also disrupt echolocation by killer whales and other toothed whale species who make noises and listen for returning echoes to locate food. Loud noises can also damage whales' hearing and cause internal bleeding. Human-made noises appear to be linked to stranding, or beaching. When noises underwater confuse whales and they mistakenly swim ashore, they often die from dehydration and crushed organs.
- 12 Pollution is another problem. In 1989, an oil tanker, the *Exxon Valdez*, hit a reef and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. It's believed that two killer whale groups that swam in that area might have experienced lower population numbers two decades after the spill.
- 13 Climate change presents more potential risks. Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, the burning of fossil fuels has released increasing amounts of carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere. Those emissions have contributed to a significant rise in global temperatures and a shift in expected patterns of weather.
- 14 Climate change is warming the ocean waters, especially in the polar regions. Some areas that once had permanent ice cover now have open water for part of the year. In other places, sea ice is melting earlier and freezing later, meaning the duration of the open-water period has increased.
- 15 Climate change could affect the areas where the whales travel. These shifts in migration could impact a whale's ability to find food or a good place to rear their young. And while belugas, also called white whales, follow and feast on fish, they might become food for other animals. Less sea ice in the Arctic seems to be linked to more killer whales in the region.
- 16 Researchers are not sure what the actual effects will be for different whale species. In one study, one beluga population traveled south later, while another group did not. And the long-term effects on the whales and environment are still unclear. On the one hand, there might be longer time to feed. But unpredictable weather patterns could mean that ice would still form early in some years. In those cases, whales could get caught in the ice.
- 17 Meanwhile, preventive measures could help save whales. Hunting bans could be better enforced. Restrictions on shipping lanes and ship speeds might reduce deaths from collisions and noise. Fishing boats might use other methods and weaker nets. Conservationists also want more marine sanctuaries—safe places that forbid fishing and hunting to protect wildlife.

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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. This question has two parts. Answer Part A first, and then answer Part B.

Part A: What is the overall text structure of “From Hunting to Helping”?

- a. Compare and Contrast
- b. Cause-Effect
- c. Problem/Solution
- d. Description

Part B: Select three sentences from the text that best support your answer to Part A.

- a. Researchers are not sure what the actual effects will be for different whale species.
- b. Less sea ice in the Arctic seems to be linked to more killer whales in the region.
- c. Meanwhile, preventive measures could help save whales.
- d. Climate change presents more potential risks.
- e. Whales need air to breathe, just as people do.

2. The author uses a word that means dangerous or unsafe. Underline a word in the paragraph below that best represents that meaning.

Packed into the ships’ many smaller whaleboats, 1,219 people made the treacherous journey through semifrozen Arctic waters before they were completely iced over. Other whaleships picked them up about 90 miles from Icy Cape, Alaska. No lives were lost, but about \$1.6 million in property was left behind, which would be worth more than \$30 million today. Rebuilding that many ships was costly, and other industries looked like safer investments.

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Test Questions (*continued*)

3. How is commercial fishing related to increased numbers of whale deaths?

- a. Fishermen hunt and kill whales on purpose.
- b. Fishermen cause there to be a lack of food for whales.
- c. Fishermen make too much noise, which harms whales.
- d. Fishermen pollute the waters where whales live.

4. Which statement below would the author of this text most likely agree with?

- a. Major threats are endangering whale populations, and people need to help before it's too late.
- b. Noise pollution is the most critical problem whale populations are currently facing worldwide.
- c. Whale populations are increasing because of strict and enforceable laws that do not allow whale hunting.
- d. Whales are magnificent mammals that need to be saved or else they will go extinct.

5. Select three supporting details below that best explain the main idea that “whales face many potential risks in their natural habitats.”

- a. In 1859, the world's first oil well was drilled in Pennsylvania.
- b. Iceland and Norway have objected to the ban and continue hunting.
- c. But too often, whales can't surface while snagged in a net, so they drown.
- d. Rebuilding that many ships was costly, and other industries looked like safer investments.
- e. Loud noises can also damage whales' hearing and cause internal bleeding.