

ORCA FACTS Part 2

What about milk? How does the mother suckle a baby orca?



The teats (or mammary glands) are located in the white underside of the belly of the mother orca. The teats are actually tucked inside a fleshy part of the mothers belly. In some populations of orca the openings for these teats have a small area of black pigmentation.



The arrow shows where the teats are, note the little patch of black pigmentation. Not all female orca have this darker patch.

Can you roll your tongue ?



Imagine trying to drink milk underwater. It would go everywhere ! However, this is exactly what all baby whale, dolphin & porpoises (collectively called cetaceans) have to do. However they have a few things to help them. Firstly their mothers milk is very thick (like yoghurt). Additionally, they are very good at rolling their tongue to form a tube, like a straw. Only some humans can do this, are you one of them?

As a baby orca is born alive and underwater, how can it breathe?

A baby cetacean is called a calf. Whilst the calf is still inside the mother, its tail flukes (see the 'orca body parts' to identify these) are curled up like a rolled newspaper. Typically calves are born tail first. This allows the calf time to exercise its tail before being born, and before it actually has to swim.



Not many people have seen cetaceans being born, but occasionally, when dolphins are kept in captivity someone gets to photograph the event*. Here are photos of a bottlenose calf being born, in captivity, in Italy. Note the slight curl still in the calf's tail flukes.

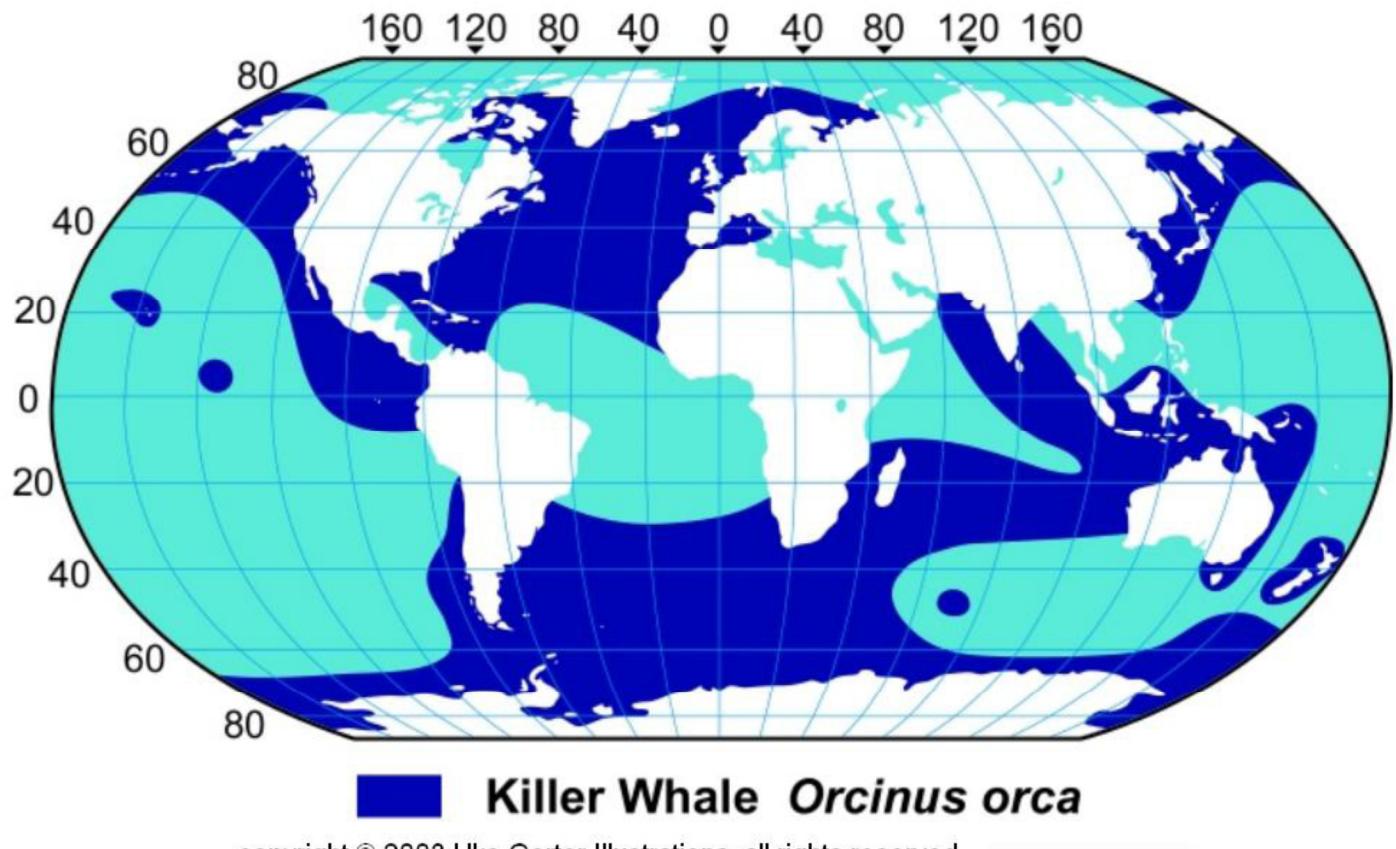
* The Orca Research Trust does not believe it is appropriate to keep cetaceans in captivity.



When the baby is born the umbilical cord is broken (remember, dolphins are mammals too, so have warm blood like us and like orca). Next the mother helps the baby to the surface. You can see in the middle photo that the dorsal fin (the back fin) is still bent over, from being inside the mother. Then the baby learns to swim next to its mother.

Thanks to Leandro Stanzani for the use of his images.

WHERE DO ORCA LIVE?



Orca are found in all the oceans of the world, although they are reported most often near the continental shelves because that is where most human activity is. Orca populations are being studied in the waters of the Arctic, Antarctica, Argentina, Azores, Caribbean, Central America, Gibraltar Straits, Iceland, Japan, Kamchatka (Russia), Norway, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Pacific Northwest (North America), North Atlantic and the United Kingdom.

NEW ORCA RESEARCH PROJECTS ARE CONTINUALLY BEING STARTED AROUND THE WORLD. EACH ONE REVEALS NEW AND EXCITING FACTS ABOUT THAT POPULATION OF ORCA.