



Whaley awesome animals!



SPECIAL SPECIES: NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE

Of all the large whales swimming in Earth's oceans today, none faces a more urgent crisis than the North Atlantic right whale. There are fewer than 370 of these animals left in the entire world, making them one of the most endangered large mammals on the planet. Their story is a difficult one, but it is also one that every ocean lover needs to know.

Right whales got their name in a grim way. Whalers once called them the "right" whale to hunt because they swim slowly, float when dead, and live close to shore. That combination made them easy targets, and by the early 1900s they had been hunted nearly to extinction. Commercial whaling of right whales is now banned worldwide, but the species has never recovered.

Today, the two biggest threats to right whales are entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ships. Right whales spend much of their time near the surface and along busy shipping lanes, making them especially vulnerable. Scientists who study right whales know most of them by name, tracking individual animals over decades by the unique patterns of rough, pale skin called callosities on their heads.

Here is something remarkable that most people do not know: right whales, like all baleen whales, still carry the remnants of their land-dwelling ancestors inside their bodies. Deep within their bodies, hidden beneath layers of blubber and muscle, are the bones of a tiny vestigial hip and femur. These are the leftover skeletal traces of the back legs their ancestors walked on millions of years ago. A cast replica of those hip and femur bones is actually part of the Forest Whales collection.

Whales did not always live in the ocean. Their story of returning to the sea is one of the most astonishing evolutionary journeys in the history of life. Those small bones are proof.

Length: 45-55 feet
Weight: 140,00 pounds
Food: Copepods
Lifespan: 70+ years
Status: Critically endangered
Number left: Less than 370





This Month IN SPAAAAACE!

August 12/13 - Perseid Meteor Shower

August 15 - Best views of Venus

August 27 - Deep partial lunar eclipse (look for the orange moon!)

PERSEID METEOR SHOWER: This is it. This year's conditions will be nearly perfect for viewing with dark skies, and 80-100 meteors per hour that travel at 37 miles per second. No telescope required. Find a dark spot, grab a blanket, and look up!

Nature

NATIVE PRAIRIES: BRINGING THE WILD HOME

Before European settlers arrived, Wisconsin was covered by millions of acres of native prairie, a vast, rolling sea of wildflowers and grasses that supported an extraordinary variety of wildlife. Today, less than one percent of that original prairie remains. But the good news is that people all across Wisconsin are bringing it back, one yard at a time.

Native prairie plants are the grasses and wildflowers that evolved in this region over thousands of years, long before lawns and gardens existed. Plants like big bluestem, purple coneflower, black-eyed Susan, and wild bergamot are perfectly adapted to Wisconsin's climate, requiring no fertilizer, very little water once established, and almost no maintenance compared to a traditional lawn. They also grow deep, powerful root systems that can reach ten feet or more underground, holding soil in place and filtering rainwater far better than turf grass ever could.



The wildlife benefits are immediate and dramatic. Native prairie plants support hundreds of species of native bees, butterflies, and other pollinators that simply cannot survive on lawn grass or non-native garden plants. Goldfinches feast on coneflower seeds in late summer. Monarch butterflies depend on native milkweeds to lay their eggs. Fireflies, which are disappearing from many parts of the country, thrive in native plantings where the tall grasses give them places to hide and hunt.

One of the most important things to know about starting a native prairie patch in your yard is that patience is required. The first year, most of the plants focus their energy on growing deep root systems and may not look like much above ground. Year two brings more growth. By year three, a native prairie planting usually explodes into a beautiful, wildlife-filled display that practically takes care of itself. The wait is absolutely worth it.





Citizen Science



CLICK THE
TURTLE TO
VISIT WEBSITE

WISCONSIN TURTLE CONSERVATION

Wisconsin is home to eleven species of turtles, from the familiar painted turtle basking on a log to the massive snapping turtle lurking in the shallows. Scientists want to know where all of them are, and that is where you come in.



The Wisconsin Turtle Conservation Program is a citizen science project run by the Wisconsin DNR. The goal is simple: if you see a turtle, report it. Using a free online form linked from the DNR's turtle conservation page, you can submit what species you saw, where you saw it, and what it was doing. Every sighting helps scientists build a more complete picture of where Wisconsin's turtle populations are healthy, where they are struggling, and where conservation efforts should be focused.

Turtles face serious threats from habitat loss and road mortality, and one of the most vulnerable moments in a turtle's life is when females cross roads to reach nesting sites in summer. The program also encourages people to protect turtle nests in their neighborhoods by building simple wire nest cages that shield eggs from predators like raccoons. Instructions and videos are available on the DNR website, and it is a great summer project for families.

August is a wonderful time to participate because turtles are still active and easy to spot basking on sunny logs, crossing roads, or moving through wetlands. Keep your eyes open on your next walk, drive, or paddle, and report what you find at dnr.wisconsin.gov.



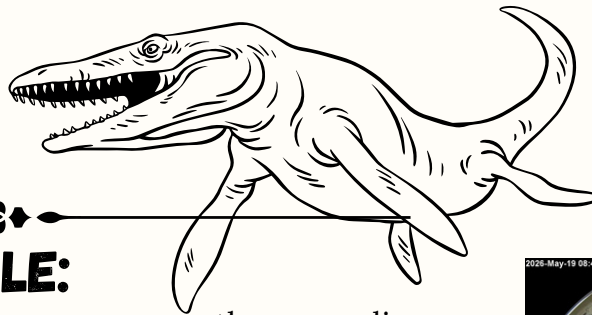
Featured Fossil: **Mosasaurs**

Sixty-six million years ago, while Tyrannosaurus rex ruled the land, something equally terrifying ruled the oceans: the mosasaur. These enormous marine reptiles were the apex predators of the Late Cretaceous seas, and they were every bit as impressive as any dinosaur that ever walked the Earth.

Mosasaurs were not dinosaurs, though they lived at the same time. They were actually more closely related to modern monitor lizards and snakes, having evolved from land-dwelling lizard ancestors that returned to the sea. Over millions of years their legs became flippers, their bodies became streamlined, and their tails developed into powerful, shark-like flukes. The result was a predator perfectly built for speed and power in the open ocean.

The largest mosasaurs, like Mosasaurus itself, could reach lengths of 50 feet or more, putting them in the same size range as a school bus. Their jaws were extraordinary, lined with large conical teeth and equipped with a second set of teeth on the roof of the mouth to grip slippery prey. Some mosasaurs also had double-hinged jaws, much like modern snakes, allowing them to swallow surprisingly large animals whole.

Mosasaur fossils have been found on every continent, including Antarctica, showing just how dominant and widespread these animals were. In North America, many of the finest specimens come from the ancient seabed of the Western Interior Seaway, a shallow inland sea that split North America in two during the Cretaceous period and now lies buried under the Great Plains. When the asteroid struck 66 million years ago and ended the age of dinosaurs, it also ended the reign of the mosasaurs. They vanished completely, leaving behind only their fossils and one enormous, unanswered question: what would the oceans look like today if they were still here?



THIS MONTH'S SCHEDULE:

We're wrapping up our summer library programs then spending some much needed time with family before school starts

8/14 - Oconto Falls Library (Public Event)

8/19 - Schreiner Memorial Library (Public Event)



BOOK AN EVENT

Want to inspire kids with a life-size whale? Contact Dave today with questions, size requirements, schedules, etc.



Clara's Corner

*School season is starting
next month!*



Friends,

I have to be honest with you. August is a bittersweet month for me.

The library programs are winding down for the summer, and I only have a couple more stops before I start getting ready for the school year. I have loved every single library visit this summer. You have been wonderful, every last one of you.

But here is the exciting part: schools are already booking for fall, and I can tell you that someone very organized in LaCrosse has already reserved me for April 2027. April! And two libraries have already booked me for next summer's programs. I cannot say too much about that yet, but let's just say next summer at Wisconsin libraries is going to be a very big deal. A mysterious, adventurous, treasure-hunting kind of big deal.

In the meantime, I have one very important plan for this month. The Perseid meteor shower peaks on August 12, and I intend to be somewhere very dark with a very clear view of the sky. I have been thinking about what it would feel like to ride on a shooting star. Just hop on, hold on tight, and streak across the sky at 37 miles per second. I think I would be very good at it. I am already very streamlined.

**UNTIL NEXT TIME,
KEEP YOUR FINS MOVING!**

Your favorite 56-foot gray whale,
Clara



FACT OF THE MONTH:

Mantis shrimp can punch with the force of a bullet. Their strike is so fast it briefly creates a flash of light and a shockwave that can shatter aquarium glass.

Time for a selfie!



SCHOOLS BOOKING NOW!

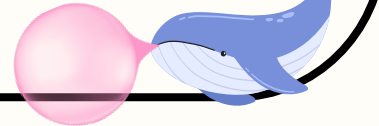
Some availability in Fall 2026.
Plenty of availability in 2027.



AND NOW FOR A REALLY BAD JOKE...

WHAT DO WHALES LIKE
TO CHEW?

Blubber gum!



The National Mississippi River Museum

Okay, okay. We know we usually highlight Wisconsin destinations in this section, but sometimes something is just too good to ignore, and the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa is absolutely worth crossing the state line.

Dubuque sits right on the western bank of the Mississippi, just a short drive from the Wisconsin border, making it an easy day trip from much of southwestern Wisconsin. And once you get there, plan to stay a while. This Smithsonian-affiliated museum sprawls across a 14-acre campus and combines a full aquarium, natural history exhibits, and genuine American river history into one of the most impressive family destinations in the entire Midwest.

The aquarium section alone features more than 200 species of animals, including river otters, giant catfish, alligators, turtles, stingrays you can actually touch, and even Gulf of Mexico marine life in the Rivers to the Sea gallery. The historical exhibits cover the full sweep of Mississippi River history, from Native American cultures and early European explorers to the golden age of steamboats and the massive engineering projects that tamed the river today. You can walk the decks of the William M. Black, a real historic dredge boat and National Historic Landmark, and catch a film in the museum's 4D theater.

The Mississippi River connects Wisconsin to the Gulf of Mexico, the same Gulf where Clara the gray whale would never actually swim but loves to talk about. Understanding this river means understanding where our water goes, where our wildlife travels, and how deeply the natural world around us is connected. The River Museum makes all of that come alive in a way that is genuinely hard to forget.

Visit rivermuseum.org for hours, ticket prices, and current exhibits.

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Wausau Daily Herald!