



# Whaley awesome animals!

## SPECIAL SPECIES: INDUS RIVER DOLPHIN



If you've never heard of the Indus River dolphin, don't feel bad—this little underwater celebrity keeps a pretty low profile. In fact, it's one of the world's rarest dolphins and lives only in Pakistan's Indus River. Think of it as the hometown hero of freshwater dolphins.

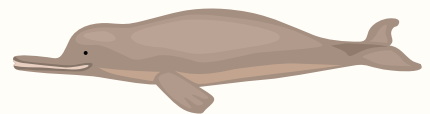
One of the most fascinating things about the Indus River dolphin is that it's basically blind. Yep. No functional eyesight at all, but don't worry, it's not bumping into rocks all day long. Instead, it uses echolocation, sending out clicks and listening for the echoes to "see" the world around it.

These dolphins also have a very distinctive look. Their beak is long and narrow—almost like a dolphin version of a pasta scoop—and their bodies are soft gray or brown. They're not huge, either. Most adults grow to around 7 or 8 feet long, which is roughly the size of a large couch.

Another fun fact: Indus River dolphins are champion breath-holders. They usually surface every 30–120 seconds to grab a breath, but they can stay underwater longer if they're feeling calm. When they do come up for air, they make a quick puff sound that locals sometimes call a "whoosh."

Sadly, these dolphins are endangered, mainly because of pollution, dams, and water use along the river. But the great news is that conservation efforts have helped their population slowly rise in recent years. Scientists, communities, and even school kids are pitching in to help protect them.

**Length:** 7-8 feet  
**Weight:** 170-220 lbs  
**Food:** Fish, and shrimp  
**Lifespan:** 25-35 years  
**Status:** Endangered  
**Number left:** 2,000



So next time you think about dolphins, remember—some of the coolest ones aren't in oceans at all. They're cruising through the winding waters of the Indus, clicking their way through life with style.



## This Month IN SPACE!

December 4 - Full Moon  
December 12-14 - Geminid meteor shower  
December 21 - Winter Solstice  
December 21-22 - Ursid meteor shower

Viewable with a telescope: Orion nebula (located in the “sword” hanging from his belt)

### Nature

## DOOR COUNTY - AN ANCIENT OCEAN

If you've ever wanted to play explorer without leaving Wisconsin, fossil hunting along Door County's stretch of the Niagara Escarpment is the perfect adventure. This ancient limestone ridge, over 400 million years old, runs like a backbone through the county, and it's packed with the preserved remains of creatures that lived long before dinosaurs ever stomped the earth.



What makes Door County so fun for fossil hunters is how easy the treasures are to spot. You don't need fancy tools or expert skills. Just stroll along rocky shorelines or hike the escarpment trails and you'll start noticing things in the stone: delicate coral fans, spiraled shells, and patterns left by ancient sea creatures. Back when this area was covered by a warm, shallow tropical sea (yes, really!), these organisms lived, died, and slowly became part of the rock beneath your feet.

One of the most common fossils you'll find is the coral, which is an animal that looks like a plant but isn't. Corals, like the “honeycomb” coral in the picture above, are common and a favorite that kids love to collect. You might also spot brachiopods (seashells), sponges, and chain corals.

The best part? Every fossil you find is a tiny piece of prehistoric history you discovered yourself. Just remember to respect park rules—some areas allow collecting, others don't—and always leave the escarpment as beautiful as you found it.  
Happy hunting, time traveler!



# DEER HUNTER WILDLIFE SURVEY

Citizen Science

## WHITETAIL WATCH

LINK HERE!

Calling all deer hunters! The [Wisconsin Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey](#) is a fun and easy way to turn your time in the woods into real scientific data. While you're out hunting, you simply report the wildlife you see, deer or otherwise, to help the DNR track population trends across the state. Your observations provide valuable insight into how animals are doing from year to year.



Participation is simple. From September 13 through January 4, you record basic details from each hunt: the date, number of hours you hunted, the county and zone, whether you were on public or private land, general weather conditions, and the number and species of deer or other wildlife spotted. Even if you don't see anything, that information is still incredibly useful.

You can submit your observations in whichever way works best for you: through a smartphone app while in the field, by entering the information later on a computer, or by mailing in a tally sheet.

By sharing what you encounter in the woods, you're helping build long-term data that guides the management of Wisconsin's deer herd and other wildlife species. It's a simple way to make a meaningful difference while doing what you already love—being outdoors.

(Note: Our October issue discussed a similar, but different, citizen science project. This one is specifically for hunters!)



## Featured Fossil: **Smilodon**

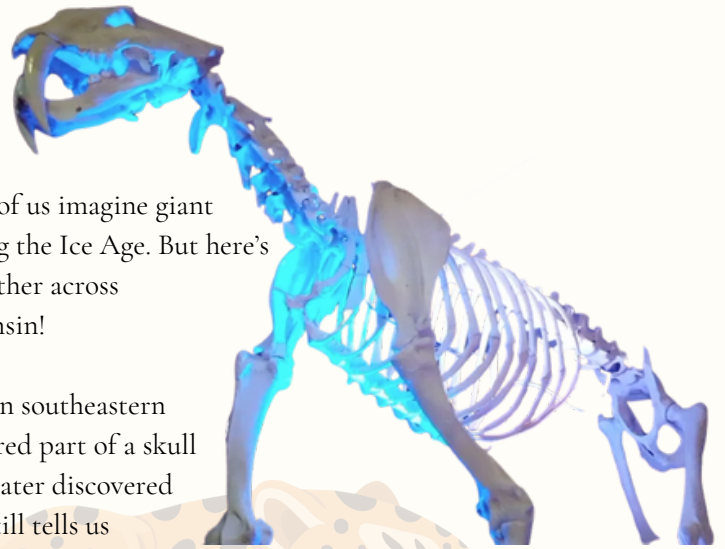
When we think of saber-toothed cats, like *Smilodon fatalis*, most of us imagine giant cats with huge fangs prowling around places like California during the Ice Age. But here's something amazing: evidence shows they may have lived much farther across North America than people once thought... maybe even in Wisconsin!

Years ago, a group of curious cavers explored Tyson Spring Cave in southeastern Minnesota. While digging through ancient sediment, they uncovered part of a skull belonging to a young saber-tooth relative. Even though scientists later discovered that these bones came from a close cousin of *Smilodon*, the find still tells us something exciting: big Ice Age cats really were wandering around this region long ago!

And there's more. Fossils of *Smilodon fatalis* have been found all across North America—from Canada all the way down into South America. Because their remains show up in so many different places, most scientists believe saber-toothed cats traveled far and wide. So even if we haven't discovered a definite *Smilodon* fossil in Wisconsin yet, it's very possible they passed through—or even lived here.

Imagine what this area looked like during the Ice Age: huge, furry mammoths; giant deer; ancient bison; and plenty of cold, open spaces perfect for sneaking up on prey. *Smilodon* had strong legs, powerful paws, and those famous long teeth, great tools for hunting big animals.

So the next time you're hiking in the woods or exploring a park, think about it: thousands of years ago, a saber-toothed cat may have walked right where you're standing!



## Free Curriculum Guides

Did you know we have free astronomy curriculum plans on our website? if you go to <https://www.forestwhales.com/curriculum>, you'll find our first two curriculum guides designed exclusively for teachers in grades K-5. We want to be a trusted educational resource for you. Go ahead and check them out!



### NO EVENTS THIS MONTH

We are intentionally **not** planning any Forest Whales events this December to focus on family, and to get ready for the very busy months ahead.

### BOOK AN EVENT

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



## THE 2025-26 SCHOOL YEAR IS FULL!

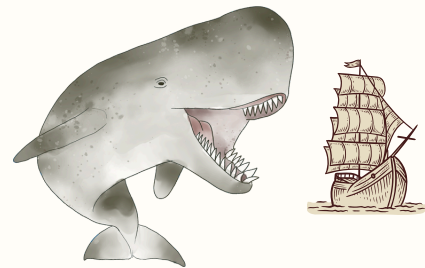
Yep, you heard it here. Forest Whales' school schedule is full through May 2026. We want to take a moment to thank the many, many (MANY!) schools that are trusting us to bring science and inspiration to their communities this school year. We are beyond excited to bring our whale to you.

And if you're one of those schools that wasn't able to schedule something this school year, know that we are already taking reservations for the 2026-27 year.

And now for a really bad joke about whales...

What do English whales love to eat for lunch?

Fish and ships.

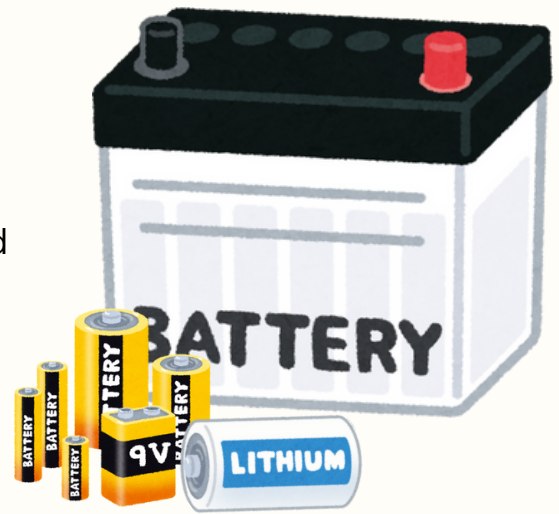


## Did you know?

The battery recycling process involves bringing materials down to a molecular level, so unlike plastics, paper, and most other recyclables, recycled cathode/diode materials don't denature over time- they can be reused indefinitely!

Recycle YOUR rechargeable batteries at a certified collector or end-recycler in your area! Its good for your health and good for the environment!

This random electronics recycling fact was brought to you by Good News Project, a 501(c)3 non-profit based in Wausau, WI.



## Want Whale Mail?

Did you receive this copy from someone else?

Whale Mail is free, and you can sign up at

[www.forestwhales.com/education](http://www.forestwhales.com/education)



Each month, we will have a featured whale and fossil, plus we will include fun activities, ideas, astronomy news, videos and even the occasional contest where we give away free prizes like fossils, or an official Forest Whales school/library program!!!