



Whaley awesome animals!

SPECIAL SPECIES: MINKE WHALE

If you ever find yourself on a whale watching boat, the animal most likely to surprise you by popping up out of nowhere is the minke whale. These sleek, fast whales have a talent for appearing suddenly right next to a boat and disappearing just as quickly, which makes them a favorite among whale watchers who love a good surprise.

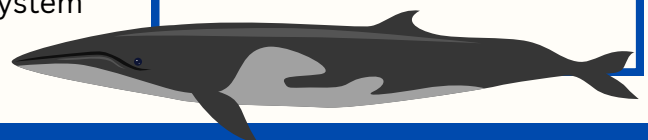
Minke whales are the smallest of the baleen whales, the group of whales that filter their food through bristly plates called baleen instead of using teeth. Don't let the word "smallest" fool you though. At up to 35 feet long and nearly 20,000 pounds, a minke whale is still an enormous animal. They are dark gray or black on top with a bright white patch on each flipper that makes them easy to identify.

Like all baleen whales, minkes are filter feeders, lunging through schools of small fish and krill with their mouths open wide, then pushing the water out through their baleen plates and swallowing whatever is left behind. They are fast, agile hunters and are found in oceans all over the world, from the tropics to the edges of polar ice.

Minke whales are generally solitary animals, usually spotted alone or in small groups of two or three. They are known for their curiosity and have been observed approaching boats and even following them for extended periods. Scientists believe they may be investigating these strange floating objects the same way any curious animal would.

Despite being the most abundant baleen whale in the world, minke whales still face threats from hunting and ocean noise pollution. They remain an important and fascinating part of every ocean ecosystem they call home.

Length: 23-35 feet
Weight: 20,000 pounds
Food: Fish, krill, plankton
Lifespan: 30-50 years
Status: Least concern
Number left: 500,000





This Month IN SPAAAAACE!

June 5 - Venus at its brightest

June 9 - Venus and Jupiter pair up

June 15 - Mercury at furthest point from sun. Catch it just after sunset with binoculars

June 21 - Celebrate the Summer Solstice. Nearly 15 hours of sunlight for Wisconsin!

With a telescope: The Hercules Star Cluster, and the Ring Nebula

Nature

THE KARNER BLUE BUTTERFLY

Wisconsin is home to hundreds of butterfly species, but few have a story as dramatic or as important as the Karner blue butterfly. This tiny, brilliantly colored insect is federally endangered, and its survival depends almost entirely on one plant: the wild blue lupine.



The Karner blue is a small butterfly, barely the size of a thumbnail, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in beauty. The males are a stunning metallic blue on top with delicate black and white borders on their wings. Females are a softer brownish blue with orange spots along the edges. They are one of the most striking insects you can find in Wisconsin, if you know where to look.

The problem is that wild blue lupine, the only plant Karner blue caterpillars can eat, grows almost exclusively in oak savanna and pine barrens habitats. These habitats were once widespread across central Wisconsin, but most have been lost to development and fire suppression over the past century. Without the lupine, there are no Karner blues. It really is that simple.

The good news is that Wisconsin has become a national leader in Karner blue conservation. Areas like the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and the Jackson County State Forest have been carefully managed with controlled burns to restore lupine habitat. These efforts have brought the butterfly back from the very edge of extinction in Wisconsin, and their populations here are now among the healthiest in the country.

If you visit the right sandy pine barrens habitat in central Wisconsin in late May or June, you might spot one of these tiny gems fluttering low among the lupine flowers. It is one of the most rewarding wildlife sightings Wisconsin has to offer.





Citizen Science

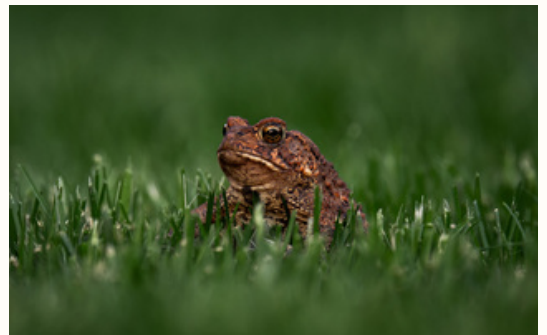
FROGS AND TOADS



CLICK THE
FROG TO VISIT
WEBSITE

Here is a citizen science project that requires you to go outside after dark and listen. If that sounds like your kind of science, welcome to the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey.

This program has been running since 1984 and is the longest running citizen science frog calling survey in all of North America. Every spring and summer, volunteers across Wisconsin head out to wetlands, ponds, and roadside ditches at night to listen for frogs and toads calling. They write down what they hear, report it to the Wisconsin DNR, and that data gets used to track the health of all twelve of Wisconsin's frog and toad species over time.



The easiest way for families to join is through the Phenology Survey, which lets you pick any wetland near your home and visit it as often as you can throughout spring and summer, spending just five minutes listening each time. No route assignment, no waiting list, no special equipment. Just you, the dark, and whatever is singing in the water.

June is one of the best months to participate because several species are calling at full volume right now, including the American toad, the green frog, and the gray tree frog. Learning to tell them apart by ear is easier than it sounds, and the DNR provides free identification guides to help.

To get started, search for the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey on the Wisconsin DNR website. Grab a flashlight, find a pond, and go listen. Science has never sounded better.



Featured Fossil:

Giant Short-Faced Bear

If you think modern bears are impressive, wait until you meet their ancient cousin. The giant short-faced bear was one of the largest and most powerful land predators that ever walked North America, and it went extinct only about 11,000 years ago. That means it shared the continent with the very first people to arrive in North America.

The giant short-faced bear, known scientifically as *Arctodus simus*, earned every word of its name. It was genuinely enormous. A large male could weigh over 2,000 pounds, nearly twice the size of the biggest polar bears alive today. When it stood up on its hind legs, it would have towered 12 feet or more in the air. And that face? Short, broad, and powerful, with jaws built for crushing bone.

For a long time scientists thought the giant short-faced bear was a hypercarnivore, meaning an animal that ate almost nothing but meat. Its long legs suggested it could run down prey over open ground at impressive speeds. More recent research suggests it may have been more of an omnivore, using its size and intimidating presence to steal kills from other predators like dire wolves and saber-toothed cats rather than doing all its own hunting.

Giant short-faced bears lived across North America during the Pleistocene epoch, roaming grasslands and open woodlands from Alaska to Mexico. Their fossils have been found in the Great Plains not far from Wisconsin, and their bones sometimes turn up at the same sites as early human artifacts.

What caused their extinction? Like most of North America's Pleistocene megafauna, the short-faced bear disappeared around the same time the last ice age ended. Whether it was climate change, human hunting pressure, or a combination of both, scientists are still working out the answer.



THIS MONTH'S SCHEDULE:

- 6/15 - Rio Public Library (Public Event)
- 6/17 - Onalaska Public Library at the YMCA (Public Event)
- 6/19 - McCoy Public Library (Public Event)
- 6/20 - Oshkosh Public 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



Hello, friends! It's me, Clara, your favorite 56-foot gray whale, coming to you from wherever the road takes me next!

I have some very exciting news. So far in 2026, I have met over 12,000 kids! That is almost enough to fill a small city! I have visited schools, libraries, gymnasiums, and parking lots, and every single one of you has made my day. From the kid who asked me if I get tummyaches to the one who asked if I was "The Bloop," thank you all. You are the reason I love my job.

Now, I have to tell you something. Last month, I mentioned a very special Spinosaurus tooth that is still looking for a home. A real one. From a real Spinosaurus. Nobody has claimed it yet, which means it is still out there, waiting. Keep your eyes on this newsletter. Its moment is coming.

But here is the thing I am MOST excited about. Next summer, in **2027**, something big is coming to libraries across Wisconsin. I cannot tell you everything yet. I can only say that it involves adventure, mystery, and possibly treasure. Stay tuned, friends. Clara has plans.

Your Favorite 56-Foot Gray Whale,
Clara

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

FACT OF THE MONTH:

A group of jellyfish is called a "smack."
That is not a joke.

An actual *smack* of jellyfish.



Dave and Clara in Wautoma



SCHOOLS BOOKING NOW!

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



AND NOW FOR A REALLY BAD JOKE...

WHY DO WHALES SWIM
IN SALT WATER?

Because pepper
makes them sneeze



Devil's Lake State Park – A billion years in one view

If you have ever stood on the bluffs above Devil's Lake and looked out over that impossibly clear water, you were looking at one of the most remarkable geological stories in the entire Midwest.

The purple and pink cliffs surrounding the lake are made of Baraboo quartzite, and they are ancient in a way that is hard to wrap your mind around. That rock is more than 1.7 billion years old, roughly a third of the entire age of the planet. It formed long before there were plants, animals, or even oxygen in Earth's atmosphere. Yet there it is, solid and stunning, right in south-central Wisconsin.



The lake itself has a much more recent story. About 15,000 years ago, the Wisconsin Glacier advanced across the landscape and split around the Baraboo Hills, which were too tough for the ice to grind down. As the glacier stalled, it dumped enormous ridges of rock and debris at both ends of an ancient river valley running through the hills. Those ridges, called terminal moraines, plugged the valley like corks in a bottle, and the spring-fed lake we know today slowly filled in behind them.

Stand on the east bluff and look west, and you are looking at the Driftless Area, a vast region of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois that was never touched by glaciers. Look down at the lake, and you are looking at a landscape shaped entirely by ice. Both worlds meet right at your feet.

Devil's Lake State Park is the most visited state park in Wisconsin, and once you understand the story under your boots, it is easy to see why. Come for the hiking and the views. Stay because the rocks have something extraordinary to say.

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