

# How do sperm whales hunt giant squid?

Sperm whales are the largest predators on earth and are thought of as gentle giants. However, these submarine-sized mammals are actually deadly hunters, killers in the ocean.

Witnessing a sperm whale hunt is impossible because they stalk their prey a mile (1.6km) above sea level. So biologist Bob Roch of New Bedford, Massachusetts, has gathered clues about how sperm whales hunt from their bones.

Bob Roch said that sperm whales would not have been able to be this huge if not for a good hunter.



An adult sperm whale has an average weight of nearly 60 tons, heavier than a Boeing 737. Its head is about the size of a minibus. In its mouth is a set of jaws filled with 10 inches (25.4cm) long, some as big as a human arm. This is the ideal tool to bite down on giant prey.

The giant squid weighs up to 1,600 pounds (726kg) and is the length of a bus. Thanks to its 5cm long suction cups and knife-like beak, the giant squid becomes one of the most formidable predators in the ocean.

At a depth of less than a mile above sea level there is no natural light, so sperm whales do not hunt visually.

So how do sperm whales find a giant squid in the dark?

Bob Rocha believes that the secret to how sperm whales hunt giant squid lies within their giant heads. Like bats, sperm whales hunt for prey with acoustic pulses emitted from their huge rectangular heads.

They first push air from the right nostril through two special muscles at the end of the head. A loud 'click' will be produced as these two muscles close and travel out of the head, through the water and bouncing off the prey like

an echo. Whales determine the location of their prey through return echoes and strike the target accurately.

Professor Patrick Miller from the University of St. Andrews said that the crackling sound of sperm whales can reach 204 decibels. If it's right next to you, that sound can make you deaf.

The snapping sound of sperm whales is the loudest in the animal kingdom and acts as a flashlight in the dark of the deep sea, helping sperm whales detect giant squids up to 1,500 feet (457m) away. .

The squid's basic auditory system cannot detect that high-frequency sound, so they are completely unaware of the presence of an enemy. This allows the sperm whale to strike unexpectedly and accurately.

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