Ever wonder what it is like to research whales? The North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog allows anyone to try their hand at identifying individual right whales based on their natural markings. We refer to this as “matching” right whales.

To try this, go to the Catalog website. First, use the links on the About page of the website to learn about the species and how we identify individual right whales. Then try your hand at it! This video will help you understand the search page in the Find a whale section of the website.

When you are ready, go through the whale pages at the end of this document and try it youself!

1. Start by choosing the whale below you want to match. Then, use the middle option on the Find a whale page on the Catalog website to enter search criteria based on the notes and what you see in the pictures. What should you be looking for? To learn more about the search criteria, click HERE. The same pictures that you are trying to match will also be on the website.

2. Once you think you have the answer, use the North Atlantic Right Whale ID Key to see if you were right! Once you know who the whale is, you can learn more about them by looking at their sightings at the bottom of their page (see yellow arrow below). If you were not successful in finding the correct whale, look at how that whale is coded (see green arrow below) in the database to see what features you may have overlooked or misinterpreted.
3. Try your hand at another one. Can you pick out all the ways the next whale looks different?

4. If you are up for a challenge, once you get more comfortable with what you are looking at, you can try the last two whales below. Those do not have notes, so you will have to use your newfound skills to interpret what you are seeing in the pictures!

Good luck and have fun!

*All photographs in the matching exercise below were taken by employees of the New England Aquarium under permits from the U.S. or Canadian governments.*
Whale #1

Distinctive trailing edge of fluke with nick

Right head – continuous 1 peninsula, medium lip callosity

Left head – continuous 1 peninsula, small lip callosity

Right peduncle with significant scarring
Whale #2

Full head – broken 2 islands, right forward

Left head – broken 1 island

Half of leading fluke edge scarred

Right head broken 1 or 2 islands, no lip callosity, scar on lower lip
Whale #3

Memorable marks on back

Left head – continuous, 1 peninsula, medium lip, memorable scar on lower lip

Blunt fluke tip

Right head – continuous, 1 peninsula, medium lip, memorable scar on both head
Whale #4

- Right head – broken 2 islands, small lip
- Divot in back
- Full head - broken 4 asymmetrical islands, 3 post blowhole callosities (1 right, 2 left) white belly and chin

- Left head – broken 2 islands, small lip

Ready to try something harder?

The next two don’t have any notes! You will have to use what you’ve learned about matching terminology to figure out what you see in the images before you search the Catalog.

Good luck!
Whale #6