

# WHAT ARE CETACEANS, AND WHY ARE SO MANY SPOTTED IN NEW ZEALAND WATERS?

Question and answer by **Jean** (age 12)



**C**etacean is scientific term used for marine mammals who belong to the order Artiodactyla, which includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

Artiodactyls are mammals with hooves. How weird is that? Dolphins don't have hooves! Well, it turns out that the ancient ancestors of cetaceans were "large, even-toed ungulates" - they had four legs, hooves, and could walk on land. Whales, dolphins, and porpoises are closely related to hippopotamuses!

Cetaceans now have fully aquatic (water-based) lifestyles, with streamlined bodies that make it easy to swim. Unlike other hooved mammals, like deer, pigs, giraffes, cows, and camels, they have solely carnivorous (meat-eating) diets.

Did you know dolphins and porpoises are types of "toothed whales", like orcas/killer whales? Baleen whales are cetaceans that don't have teeth.

Almost 50% of the world's cetaceans live in or visit New Zealand waters. Some are found nowhere else in the world, like popoto and ahoaho | Māui and Hector's dolphins. Species like giant parāoa | sperm whales are seen regularly and attract thousands of tourists each year. Some species are seen very rarely,

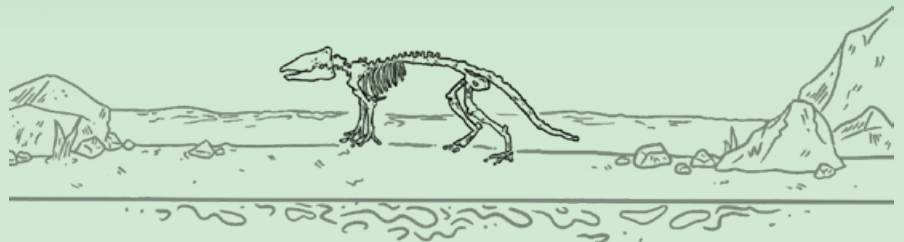
such as the spectacled porpoise, the only porpoise in our waters. Two reasons why New Zealand waters are a hotspot are:

1. They're highly nutritious - filled with rich food and nutrients that these animals need to survive.
2. They're part of the migration paths for many different species of whales.

Download a copy of the skeletons so you can try your hand at drawing their bodies!



## The first whale - Pakicetus



Living a more aquatic life - Ambulocetus

## Fully aquatic - Parāoa | Sperm whale

