



Mouths agape, humpback

whales in southeast Alaska's Frederick Sound devour a school of herring. The whales circle beneath the small fish, unleashing a torrent of air bubbles that cause the confused herring to swarm together—making them easy prey. A whale can easily eat a ton of herring daily.

Alaska's nutrient-rich coastal waters offer an unparalleled opportunity to see whales, dolphins, and porpoises. In all, 17 species of cetaceans frequent Alaska waters, from the smallest harbor porpoise to the enormous blue whale, longer than two school buses. The most common sightings



are humpback, gray, and killer whales. The rarest sighting: the highly endangered northern right whale, of which fewer than two dozen are known to frequent Alaska's southeastern Bering Sea.

Overall, whale numbers have been on the rise in recent decades, thanks to

international bans on hunting and harassment. Yet, scientists wonder if whale resurgence will be long-lived, given environmental changes that have left traditional feeding areas less able to support their immense appetites. Scientists and whale-watchers say whales are traveling farther north in search of food.