

Whales

While many might still contend that fish feel no pain, against all evidence provided, few would argue against the fact that whales are capable of suffering. Whales have long been abused at the hands of humans, whether them being slaughtered for oil in streetlamps, being used for bombing practice in WWII or incarcerated in tiny tanks for human entertainment, some of the most intelligent animals on our planet continue to suffer at the hands of human caprice and greed.

Humans have been hunting whales for food for thousands of years with the Inuit in the Arctic Oceans relying on whales for their survival. Others like the Basques in the Atlantic and Japanese in the Pacific relied on the trade for economic growth. Beginning in the 16th century, whales began to be hunted in much large numbers by Europeans and Americans, predominantly to provide oil for streetlamps and soap, but also as a lubricant for instruments and machinery. By the 20th century, the uses for whale oil had expanded to include margarine, carriage springs, corsets, fishing poles, umbrella ribs, typewriter ribbons and the explosive material nitro-glycerine. Right up until the 1960s, oil from the liver was used as a source of vitamin D, and blubber, bones and flesh were used to produce cosmetics and detergents (370).

As whaling spread, in order to aid the industrialization of our societies, whale populations began to decline, and it was harder to locate them near the coasts. Rather than slow down the hunting to allow populations to recover, our ancestors did the opposite and expanded the search to include the South Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. It is difficult to get accurate numbers for whale populations prior to large scale hunting, but is estimated that in the 21st century, humans devastated whale populations to the tune of around three million creatures. 276,442 whales were harpooned in the North Atlantic, 563,696 in the North Pacific and the Southern Hemisphere accounted for 2,053,956. Due to the enormous size of whales, this is considered the largest extermination of any wild animal by humans, when calculated by total biomass. Around two thirds of sperm whales, and a staggering 90% of the largest animal to share the planet with us, the blue whale, were killed. There are estimated to be a few thousand blue whales left in our oceans. These numbers may strike some readers as rather

large, but they are only an estimate of those taken from the oceans, the number is likely higher with many hunts going untraced. This annihilation was all done in the name of “development”. While the use of quotation marks may strike some as strange, they are used to highlight our strange, continued belief in human development, even as human development looks likely to actually mean the sixth extinction and our own eventual demise. As one species became harder to locate, whalers would simply switch to another, and then another, until commercial hunting was outlawed temporarily in the 1980s (371).

Whaling is back in the news recently as Japan has abandoned its pretence of hunting for scientific purposes and withdrawn from the *International Whaling Commission* (IWC) to hunt commercially. After its withdrawal, Japan must now abandon the Antarctic and only hunt in its exclusive economic zone. A strict quota of 383 whales has been set. This is only 60% of the number it hunted under the auspice of “science” in 2018 (372). It seems when it is on its own doorstep, the Japanese government cares more about the damage it inflicts on these elephants of the sea. Some Japanese justify this barbaric behaviour as the continuation of tradition, but as in any tradition that involves inflicting mass suffering, this is no justification. If it were, women would never be able to enter the workforce, slavery would be commonplace, and “witches” would continue to be drown to death. It is not only Japanese who continue to slaughter these incredibly intelligent and sophisticated animals. The Faroe Islands, who have been whaling for around 1,000 years continue to turn the ocean red with an estimated 873 pilot whales killed annually for the past 300 years (373). Again, tradition is given as justification, but whaling was a tradition of many nations who have nevertheless moved on. Two other European nations that have steadfastly refused to stop this ritual slaughter are Norway and Iceland. Norway has taken the mantle of largest hunter of whales on the planet with 1,278 being killed in 2018 (374). In the same year, Iceland killed a protected blue whale off its coast which on closer inspection was a rare hybrid blue and fin whale. Blue whales have been protected since the 1960s after being hunted to the brink of extinction (375).

Whales have been known to explore the depths of our oceans with the deepest known dive recorded at 2,992 metres. To put things in a little context, that is a

rough equivalent of three Mount Snowdons, the highest peak in the author's birthplace; coincidentally also called Wales. Their diving skills are not the only thing about whales that are deep, so it seems is their thinking. Whales, like humans have large brains and most animals with large brains have certain characteristics, namely they live long lives, are sociable, have complicated behaviours and they take special care of the few children that they produce. They teach their children life skills and raise them slowly until they become independent of their mothers when they become sexually mature. Whale brains have spindle neurons which are associated with abilities like recognition, memory retention, communication, perception, adaptation, problem-solving, understanding and even reasoning. Toothed whales even have some special powers that humans would consider superhuman. They are able to use echolocation to help them navigate murky waters, hunt, and even it seems, check on each other's pregnancies (376).

Scientists now believe that human intelligence may have developed as a way of coping with existing in large and complex social groups. This theory is known as *Cultural Brain Hypothesis* and might also apply to whales and dolphins. Sperm whales, who have the largest brain on the planet communicate in local dialects, orcas each have individual names which other pod members use to call them, and it is even possible that some dolphins practice the art of gossiping about absent pod members (377). In 2018, the world was gripped by images of a female killer whale known as J-35. The mother carried her calf, who had died shortly after birth, for a full seventeen days in what is thought likely to be a show of grief. It is common for southern resident killer whales, but these displays of grief usually last less than a day. These are the same whales who are struggling to feed themselves due to human overfishing of their food source, chinook salmon (378). The largest creature on Earth, the blue whale, has developed such incredible communication skills that it is able to communicate with other blue whales across thousands of kilometres of ocean. These mostly solitary animals use a frequency well below the ability of a human ear, but nevertheless make it both the largest and loudest animal to share our planet (378).

Understanding what we do about the intelligence and social nature of these majestic animals should be enough for a species that calls itself the 'wise one' to

want to leave them in peace, but we will see that it isn't only the people of Japan, Iceland, Norway and The Faroe Islands that are abusing these deep thinkers of the deep blue.

Starting in the autumn of 1961, humans began a perverse experiment with whales, in this particular case, Orcas or killer whales as they are known for their incredibly effective team hunting skills. A single female whale was noticed swimming in Newport Harbour, south of Los Angeles. She was corralled and eventually hoisted onto a flatbed truck and transported to the nearby *Marineland of the Pacific* 'amusement' park. The next day, she went berserk and swam at full speed into the tank repeatedly until she convulsed and died. In the wild orcas would be expected to travel around one hundred km per day, so is it any wonder that orcas in captivity suffer enormous amounts of stress and often succumb to violence against their 'trainers' who we should really call their oppressors. You might think that after this original debacle, the owners at the 'amusement' park would have realised the folly of their calamitous decision. Of course, the answer would be no, the next autumn, September 1962, they took their forty foot collecting boat, the *Geronimo*, to Puget Sound in Washington State to look for another wild animal to entertain the masses of 'civilized' animals back on shore. Once again, things did not go to plan. The A-Team, this was not. After a month of searching, two orcas, a male and a female, appeared out of the mist and appeared to be chasing after a porpoise. After the orcas chased the porpoise round the boat a few times, the men on board threw a lasso around the female who duly dove down deep in a fit of panic. She ended up getting caught in the heavy nylon line and wound it around the propeller shaft which in turn immobilized the boat. She had around 250 feet of rope around her and as she got to the end of her tether, both figuratively and literally, her male companion appeared and they both started to swim at full speed towards the boat. They charged several times, always turning at the last opportunity but managing to thump the boat with their flukes as they did so. At this point, *Frank Brocato*, who was chief animal 'collector' at *Marineland* grabbed his 375-magnum rifle and shot the male who then disappeared. The female was shot ten times before she died. The head animal 'collector' at *Marineland* then towed the body to shore where she was weighed and measured before being rendered into dog food. *Brocato* then took the teeth as souvenirs (380). These are people who will pretend to care about wild animals and argue that their facilities are necessary for

education and conservancy. People often argue that wild animals also kill other animals, like in this case the orcas chasing a porpoise, and this somehow gives humans the justification to also do the same. The simple truth though is that no other animal considers itself to be civilized like we do. If we were truly civilized, then killing animals for any other reason than survival would be seen as abhorrent behaviour. According to Merriam Webster's online dictionary, the definition of civilized is *especially characterized by taste, refinement, or restraint*. If we cannot restrain our impulses, then are we truly civilized?

One would have thought that the disastrous events in Puget Sound might have ended our plans to hold orcas captive, but just two years later, the first live orca was exhibited in *Vancouver Aquarium*. He was harpooned in Vancouver harbour and died three months later. He was named *Moby Doll* (380).

A year later, another orca was caught accidentally in a fishing net in British Columbia. This wonderfully complex creature was sold to *Seattle Public Aquarium* for \$8,000 in cash and became the first killer whale forced to perform tricks for clapping, seal like humans. The male orca was named *Namu* and he endured thirty-one years in captivity before his death from infected water. A year after *Namu* was caught in a fishing net, the owner of *Seattle Public Aquarium*, probably using the successful, albeit accidental capture as inspiration, devised a technique to capture wild orcas using netting. This method was used to capture more than two-hundred orcas by the early 1970s. Most of whom were sent to *Sea World* (380).

In 1970, there was public outcry in Washington State as eighty whales were corralled, and several died in the process. The dead whales had their bellies slit before being weighted down with chains. The outcry, unfortunately, wasn't enough to turn the tide against the inhumane practice of keeping wild animals in captivity for the entertainment of the great 'wise-one'. In 1976, an assistant to Washington State Governor, *Dan Evans* was out sailing when he witnessed *Sea World* captors using aircraft and explosives to herd and net whales. After receiving this information *Dan Evans* sued *Sea World* and the whales were eventually released. *Sea World* lost its permit to capture wild orcas in Washington State and to date Washington State remains a sanctuary for them. Unfortunately, it isn't a sanctuary for their wild prey, the chinook salmon (380).

Not to be deterred, in 1976, *Sea World* worked a little more clandestinely than dropping bombs from airplanes and hatched a plan to steal whales from Iceland. Whales were airlifted from Reykjavik to Holland and then forwarded on to *Sea World* in San Diego where they were turned into performing clowns. Nine whales were acquired for *Sea World* in this way. Between the years 1976 and 1979, twenty-one Icelandic killer whales were captured for the amusement of humans in America, France, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong and Switzerland. A further four orcas were caught in Iceland in 1989 (380).

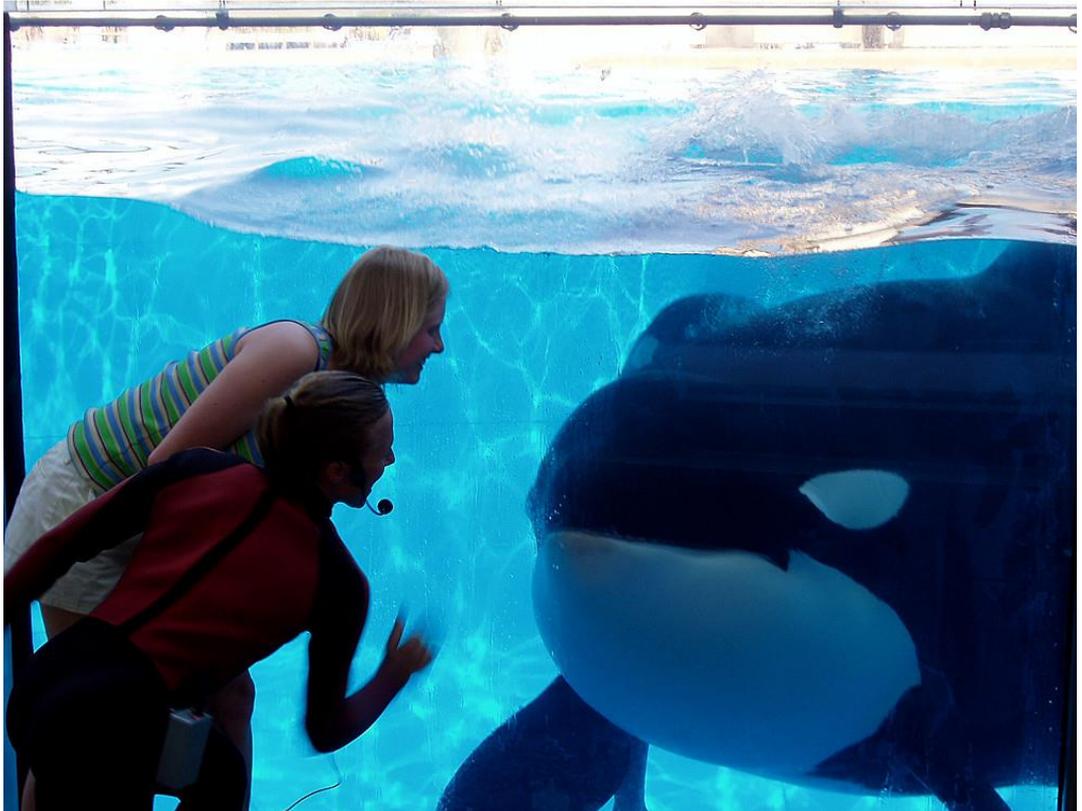
Not to be outdone by their American and Icelandic competitors, the Japanese started to get in on the depravation. Beginning in the 1980s, the Japanese started to hunt false killer whales for food, with the most beautiful sold to aquariums and the U.S. Navy. These are members of the dolphin family, but they are large and resemble killer whales in the shape of their skulls and dark colourings. Animals are supposed to be caught in seine nets, but the Japanese practice drive fishing, where fishermen make noise under water, which confuses the animals, and they are driven into small coves where they are brutally murdered, often in front of their offspring who are then sold to aquariums throughout Japan (380). The murders continue in Japan up to this day and were highlighted in the Oscar award winning documentary movie, *The Cove*. To date, 2,000 dolphins, 227 beluga whales and fifty-three orcas are still kept in captivity worldwide where they continue to be used as profitable entertainment. The longest tank in the world is a mere seventy meters long and twelve metres deep. In the wild, orcas have been recorded travelling more than 9,400 km in forty-two days and reaching speeds of thirty miles per hour (381).

The massive ocean warming that is being driven by our “progress” is yet another obstacle to the whales’ survival. Add to this, the impact of overfishing, and the future does not look bright. The keystone species in the Southern Ocean is krill and they support penguins, orcas, whales, seals, seabirds and many fish species. As waters in the Antarctic warm, the krill may either migrate or decline in numbers (480). By 2100, it is estimated that they may lose between 20% and 55% of their habitat (480). This is already helping push the Southern right whale to the edge of oblivion as they are struggling to adapt their behaviour as fast as the waters are warming. They are hunting different species further north, but the

number of infants they produce is declining. Instead of birthing every three years, they are now breeding every four or five years (482). While this is partly due to warming, it is also being driven by our demand for farmed fish. This is where the vast majority of Antarctic krill end up, and the whales end up losing out to human demand (483). At the northern tip of the planet, bowhead, narwhal and beluga whales are equally challenged by migrating prey due to warming waters (484). There, they face a hostile future that is sure to include a mass extermination event of the Arctic's inhabitants. Once the Arctic summer sea ice has fully retreated, the world's fishing fleet will descend upon the pristine seas and one of the last remaining refuges for ocean wildlife will be lost forever.

If the absolute tragedy of enslaving these resplendent wild animals for our own entertainment and stealing their food isn't enough to convince you of the need to leave our wild cousins in peace, then maybe a more pragmatic reason will. Whales alive today act as giant carbon sinks, literally. Each whale stores tons of carbon each and when they die, they sink to the bottom of the ocean where the carbon is taken out of the atmospheric cycle for hundreds of thousands of years. It is estimated that around 30,000 tons of carbon is safely stored in this way each year and if we can help whale populations to rebound to their pre-commercial whaling days, then this figure could increase to 160,000 tons. It is even possible they do more to help our fight while they are alive. As whales feed on tiny marine organisms like krill in the depths of the ocean before heading to the surface where they poop and pee, these nutrients then stimulate the growth of phytoplankton which act as huge carbon sinks, just like land-based vegetation. Most of this carbon gets recycled as it is eaten, but some that die also sink to the bottom where they are taken out of the system. It is believed that sperm whales in the Southern Ocean draw 200,000 tons of carbon out of the atmosphere each year in this way. To be as pragmatic as humans can possibly be, the service each whale provides in this manner is estimated by the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) to be worth \$2 million. If whale populations could be brought back to their pre-commercial whaling numbers, then scientists predict that 1.7 billion tons of carbon could be captured. This is more than the carbon dioxide emissions of Brazil, home to another huge carbon sink, the Amazon rainforest (381).

It seems that whether the reason is humaneness or carbon capture, it is vital that we reverse the damage we have inflicted on these giants of the sea. If we don't, then it could be us sinking into the dark abyss.



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Dear Indy,

I hope after reading the last few sections that you will understand why we have never taken you to an aquarium or zoo. We even pulled you out of a kindergarten visit to Miyajima Aquarium when we were living in Tenno, Hiroshima. As an educator myself, I see absolutely no useful lesson in taking young human children to these prisons that display children who were stolen from their families and often witnessed their family members being murdered. Any educators involved in these trips should hang their heads in shame. The only lesson one can take from them is that humans are callous entities and lack empathy for any being that cannot communicate in human tongue.

I have my own shame to confront as I was one of these clapping seal-like zombies on a trip to Sea World, Florida sometime in the late 1980s.

The name of the orca that was forced to entertain me then was Kalina. She was the first surviving baby born in captivity. She was part of a show called Shamu even though the original Shamu had died in 1971. The name was trademarked like a can of cola.

I remember my excitement waiting in that stadium as thousands of people cheered. I had no idea what I was doing as she jumped out of the water and came crashing down with a thunderous plop, sending huge flumes of water into the crowd who cheered louder and louder. The terror and confusion this poor creature must have endured on a daily basis as she was deprived of any natural stimulants or the company of one of her own kind was unfortunately beyond my comprehension. My parents even bought me an inflatable 'Shamu' for me to play with in the hotel pool.

Kalina went on to give birth to Keet in 2004 and the cycle of abuse continued. In March 2016, Sea World finally decided to end its breeding programs meaning that this generation will be the last to suffer in their 'amusement' parks. Whether they survive in the wild as overfishing continues, and the seas warm, is uncertain. At least, we as a family are no longer contributing to their demise through our diets or entertainment. Hopefully, others will begin to make the connection too.