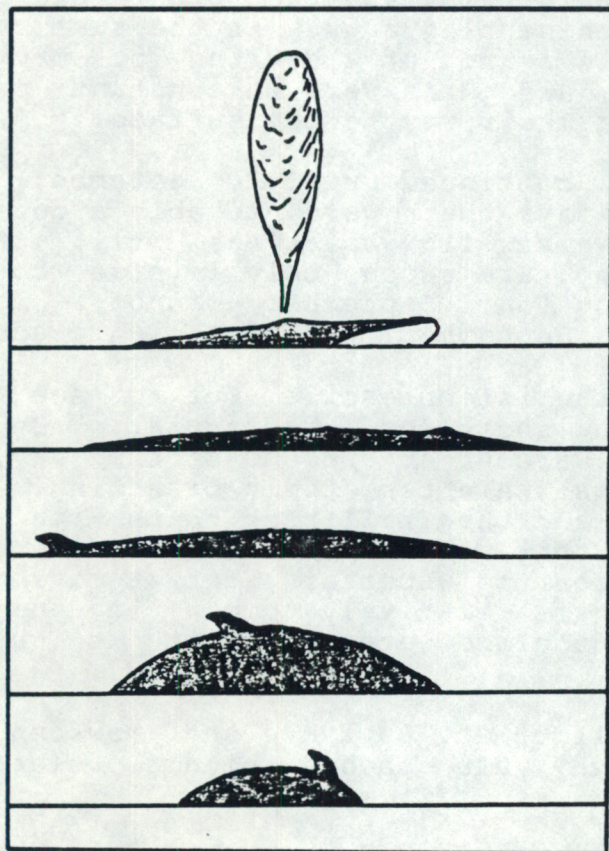


uncommon around the Island? The answer doesn't lie in scarcity of food, because mackerel, herring, and other pelagic fish are as common here as they are elsewhere. But the waters around the Island are very warm in the summer, and this may make it harder for seabirds and sea mammals to catch their prey. Fish are cold-blooded animals, and the warmer the water the faster their "burst speed" for emergency predator avoidance. Thus seabirds and whales that spend their summers in eastern Canadian waters may prefer areas where colder waters make the fish more sluggish and easier to catch. Nevertheless, the big whales can hardly refuse the gastronomic windfall that comes on a herring spawning ground. Because the fish that come to eat herring eggs are sometimes so stuffed that their swimming is seriously impaired, they may be as easy to catch as fish that are slowed by chilly water elsewhere. On such occasions, Prince Edward Island can boast whale concentrations as impressive as any in the West Atlantic.

A note on identification

Both fin and minke whales are baleen whales, which use comb-like plates to filter large plankton and small fish from the water. Except in unusual circumstances like breaching, whale-watchers are likely to see only the animal's back. When baleen whales surface, the dorsal surface appears in sequence, as if one were rolling a hula hoop in water almost deep enough to cover it. The back of the head appears first, and the animal spouts. As the head sinks, the mid-back appears, to be followed by the rear section which carries the fin. Minke and fin whales can be distinguished by their size (adult fins are 18-23 meters, minkes are 7-9 meters). They can also be separated by the much briefer surface interval of the minke. Other great whales including blues and humpbacks may stray into our waters. Blue whales can be identified by their great size and very small dorsal fin, and humpbacks have a distinct hump on the leading edge of the dorsal fin.



This shows the surfacing sequence of a fin whale. Note the progressive appearance of the back from head to dorsal fin. In this sequence the whale is arching its back before the dive, which means that it anticipates a long, deep dive. This posture would not be found around Prince Edward Island because deep dives are not possible in our shallow waters.