

# ORCA CHAT

If you could dive into the water and swim along with a group of orcas, you'd be amazed at the noise you'd hear all around you. That's because orcas "talk" to each other using different sounds.



The three main sounds orcas make are clicks, whistles, and pulsing calls, but they also make popping sounds and jaw claps. They'll even slap their fins or tails against the surface of the water to make loud noises. Some of the sounds can be heard for miles! Scientists are studying orca talk to try to figure out what it all means.

## ON THE HUNT

Orcas are sometimes called “killer whales” because they’re such fierce predators. Whether they hunt separately or in a group, they have some clever tricks for catching prey. For example, orcas may swim toward an ice floe with a seal on it in order to make a big wave that knocks the seal off. Or an orca may come right out of the water onto a beach or ice floe in order to grab an unsuspecting seal or penguin.

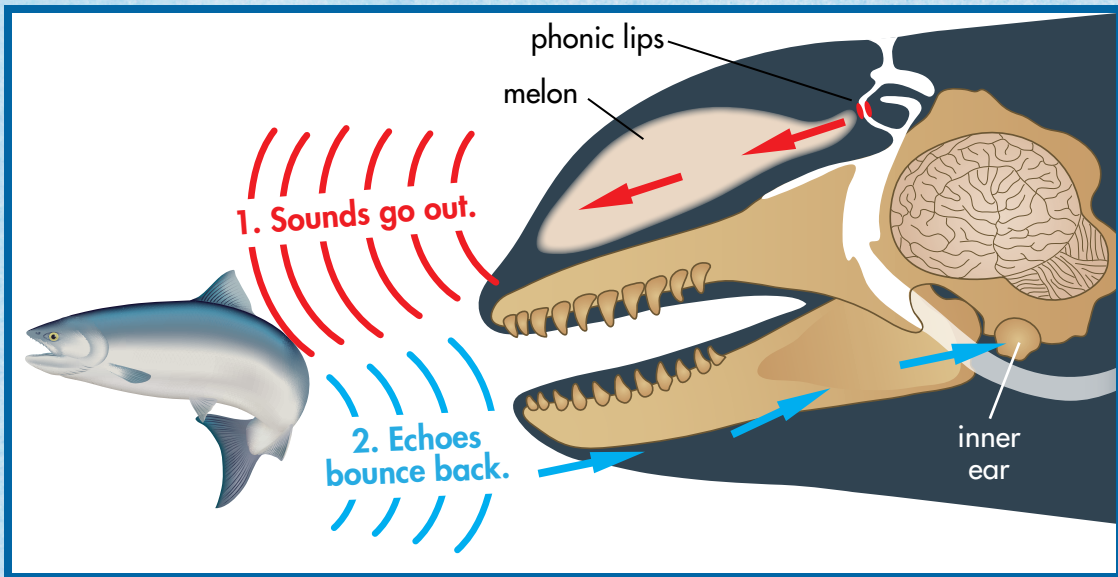
A group of orcas will herd a school of fish into a tight circle and then whack at the group with their tails. This knocks out the fish so that the orcas can more easily gobble them up.

An orca’s sharp, cone-shaped teeth are perfect for ripping and tearing food. Depending on their ecotype, orcas eat a variety of prey, including seals, fish, penguins, sea turtles, whales, and even other dolphins.



**GULP!**  
**RACCOONS AREN'T**  
**ON THE MENU,**  
**ARE THEY?**





## Seeing with SOUND

An orca has a neat way of zeroing in on prey—it uses echoes. This is called **echolocation** (see diagram). An orca first makes some clicking sounds by passing air between lip-like parts in its head, called phonic lips. The sounds pass through another part in the orca's head, called the melon. The melon helps aim the sounds straight ahead (red lines). If the sounds hit something in front of the orca, they bounce back as echoes (blue lines). The sounds travel through a fat-filled part of the orca's jaw to its ears, which are inside its head.

By listening to the sounds, the orca can tell the size and shape of the object, as well as how far away it is and which way it's going. Orcas also use echolocation to find their way in murky water.

THEY REALLY ARE "SEEING WITH SOUND!"



## ORCAs FoReVeR!

Orcas are amazing creatures. From watching them in nature programs to enjoying them on whale-watching tours, people can't seem to get enough of orcas. Even people from long ago were fascinated by them, as you can see below from this 300-year-old rock drawing of an orca.

And why not? Orcas have everything—brains, beauty, and strength, all wrapped up in a beautiful black-and-white package.

