

KINGDOM OF THE BLUE WHALE - BACKGROUND

National Geographic Channel takes students and their teachers into the Kingdom of the Blue Whale. With Crittercam technology, the blue whale's world is revealed - its environment, habitat, feeding, migration patterns, communication and for the first time underwater footage of a newborn blue whale calf. National Geographic Crittercam technology also captures unique footage from the blue whale's perspective of blue whale eating krill.

The largest creatures to ever live on our planet blue whales are so rare that experts know very little about them. They deliver the world's largest babies, but most of the places where blue whales calve their young remain a mystery. They are one of the loudest animals on earth – but we struggle to hear them. Tragically, in most places their future is threatened.

In many places, Blue whales in the Eastern North Pacific population once numbered close to 10,000 animals, but over a century of whaling has taken its toll. Even though hunting of blue whales has been banned since the 1960s, today, fewer than 2,000 blues are left in what was the largest-known concentration on Earth – the Antarctic. In an effort to learn more about these behemoths and help to protect them, an international team of scientists supported by the National Geographic Society sets out on an expedition to unlock the secrets of the blue whale and investigate why more are dying than ever before.

Kingdom of the Blue Whale also opens a window into why these animals have become one of the world's most endangered species. Today, our oceans are busier and noisier, and resources the whales depend on are disappearing. And while blue whale hunting is now illegal, they remain under assault by another killer – huge, ocean-going cargo vessels. Whale experts also worry that the amount of industrial noise in today's oceans might play a role in their deaths.

Narrated by Tom Selleck, the special tracks scientists as they test three significant theories in blue whale behaviour at the Costa Rica Dome – courtship, calving and winter feeding. The team confirms that calves have been born at the Dome, and they confirm that blues feed all year round in this location – a behaviour never before observed in blue whales here.

In following this research, Kingdom of the Blue Whale offers breathtaking HD footage of these majestic animals. The imagery captured of mother and newborn baby blue whale is stunning and poignant. The baby blue whale – curious about its environment – swims towards the scientists' research boat and passes just underneath the underwater photographers. The research team also spots a juvenile loggerhead sea turtle and whale shark – both extremely rare to see.

After tagging 15 blue whales with a special satellite technology to track their locations, scientists hope to follow some of these blue whales to an area stretching over 100km known as the Costa Rica Dome in the Pacific Ocean to investigate these behaviours. The Dome acts as a nursery for many species, and the scientists suspect this is where some blue whales travel to mate and give birth.

We also join geneticists on the research team who obtain samples of whale meat at a Japanese fish market to see if blue whales (an endangered species protected under international law) are being sold. Researchers not only find that blue whale meat is being sold, but that blue whales have started mating with fin whales, leading to a hybrid species.

The special National Geographic Channel programme is an invaluable and timely learning resource for any classroom or student.