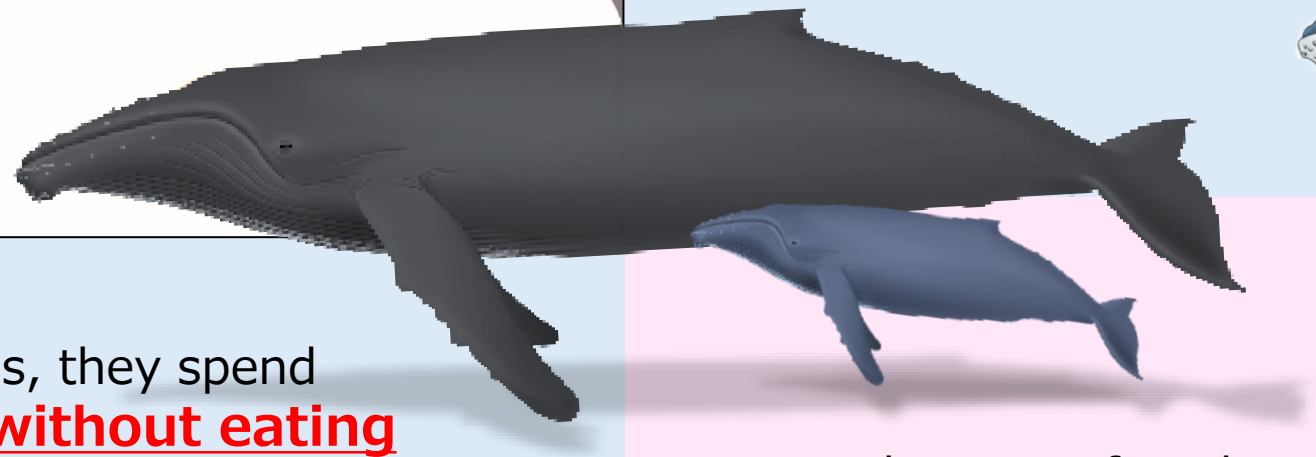
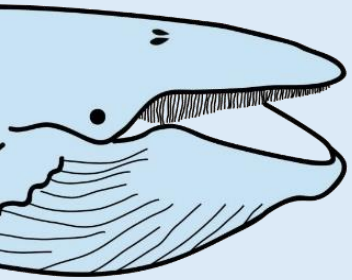
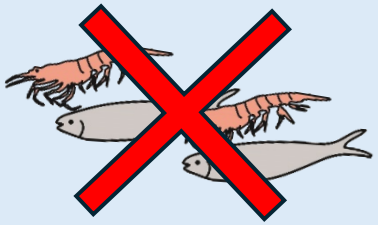
Why is it important to minimize disturbance to mother–calf whales in breeding areas?

① Humpback whales travel about **4,000–6,000 km** from cold feeding areas near Russia to warm breeding areas for mating, birth, and calf care.

② 

③ In breeding areas, they spend **several months without eating — or eating almost nothing!**





④ During this time, female whales **give birth in the breeding waters (Here!)** after about a year of pregnancy.

Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation

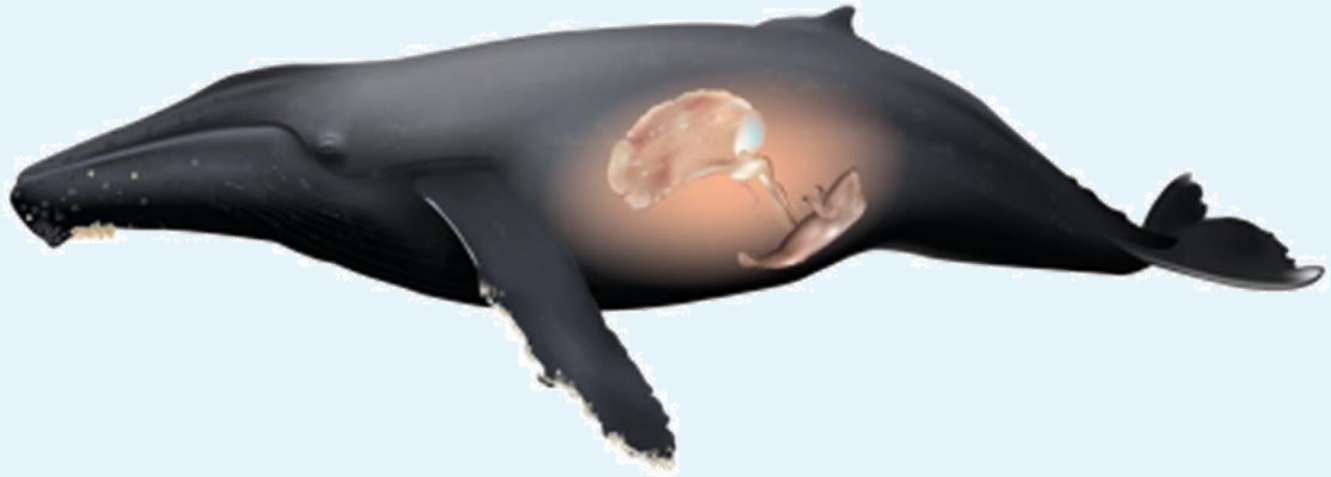
Just before birth, a pregnant whale's **energy use increases dramatically!**

Studies show that,

Nearly 99% of a mother whale's pregnancy energy use is concentrated in the final ~100 days before birth!

At the same time, this is also a period when…

- **travel thousands of kilometers**
- **eat very little**
- **use a lot of energy to get ready for give birth**



With all of these factors combined,

the period **just before birth is an especially demanding time for pregnant female whales in breeding areas —when even simply staying afloat requires a great deal of energy**.

Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation

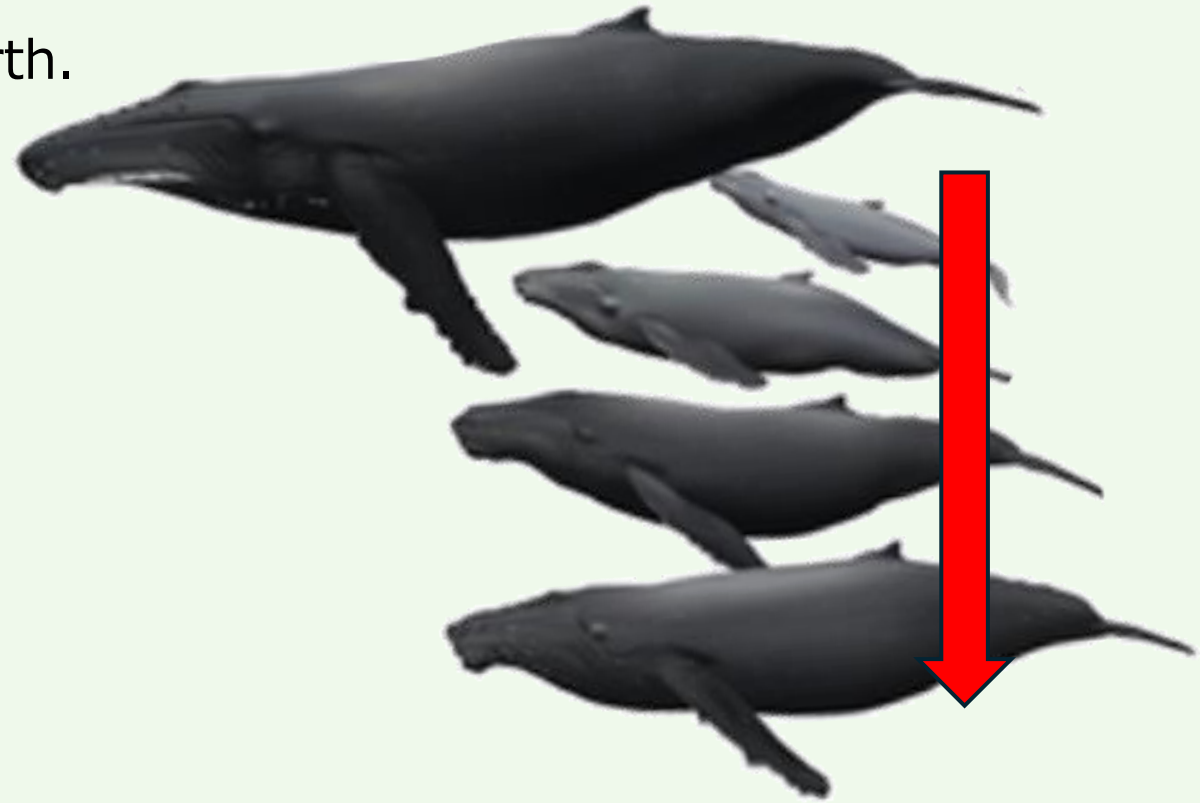
After the baby is born, it becomes even harder for the mother!!

Calves (babies) grow extremely fast after birth.

Their growth requires about
38 times more energy than before birth.

To grow, calves need
6–8 times more energy
per day than adults.

Baby whales get all the energy they need
only **from their mother's milk.**
That's why …

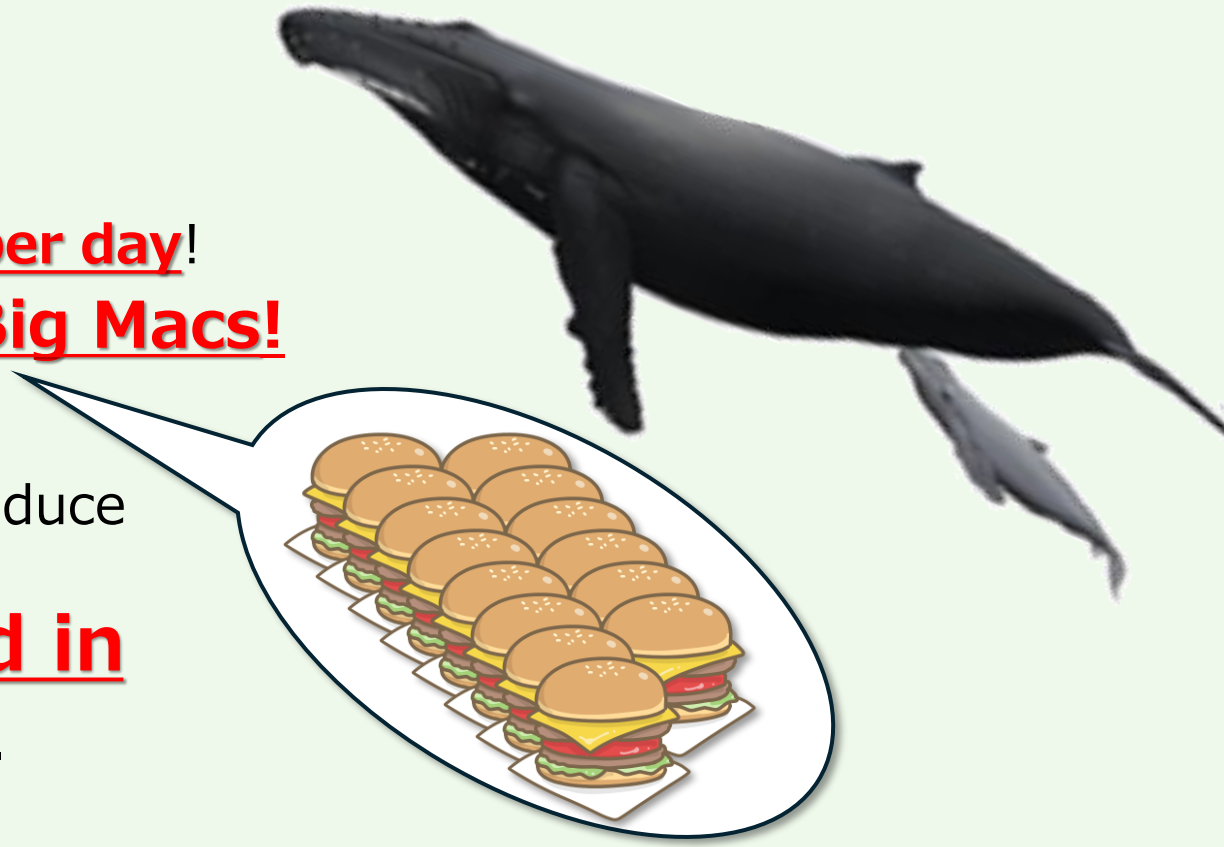


Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation

During nursing, mother whales steadily lose weight day after day...

In breeding areas, nursing mother whales
lose about 100 kg of body weight every single day.

That's about **621,000 kilocalories per day**!
830 kilograms of krill **—or about 1,000 Big Macs!**



During the nursing period, mother whales produce this enormous amount of energy every day
using only the nutrients stored in their own bodies to raise their calves.
Furthermore, …

Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation

The calf's "most important growth period" happens in breeding areas!

Calves grow rapidly during
the first few months after birth!

Research shows that,
more than 60% of the energy needed for a calf's growth is concentrated within the first 150 days after birth.

This same ~150-day period is when mothers stay in breeding areas without eating,
and **when mothers and calves begin their journey together toward the feeding areas**.

Therefore,
Birth, nursing, growth, and long-distance migration place
heavy demands on both mother and calf.

Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation

For this reason, it is especially important to “gently watch over” mother–calf whales.

Studies show that,

from late pregnancy through raising a calf is the

hardest time of the year for humpback whale mothers and calves.

For this reason, during this period, it is especially important for mother–calf whales to have:
“time to rest”, “time for nursing”, and “time to recover their strength”.

Getting too close or **watching too often** can make mother and baby whales **change their behavior** and **use extra energy**. **This can affect how well the calf grows and survives**.

That is why we try to minimize disturbance to mother–calf whales and choose to watch over them quietly and gently.

Aswegen et al. (2024 a, b, 2025), Okinawa Churashim Foundation