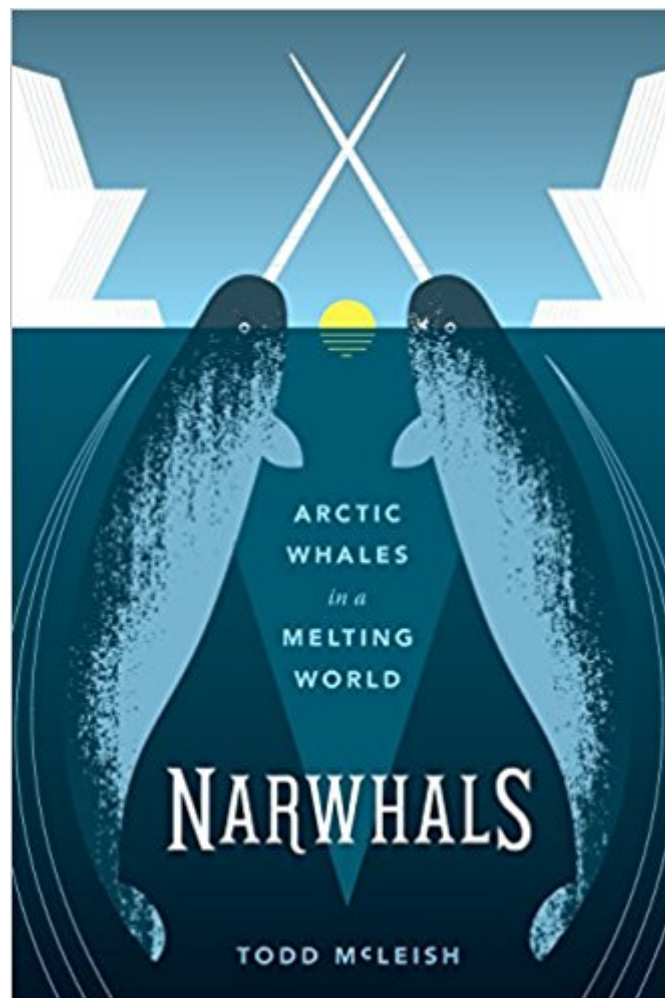


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Narwhals: Arctic Whales In A Melting World (Samuel And Althea Stroum Books)



Synopsis

Among all the large whales on Earth, the most unusual and least studied is the narwhal, the northernmost whale on the planet and the one most threatened by global warming. Narwhals thrive in the fjords and inlets of northern Canada and Greenland. These elusive whales, whose long tusks were the stuff of medieval European myths and Inuit legends, are uniquely adapted to the Arctic ecosystem and are able to dive below thick sheets of ice to depths of up to 1,500 meters in search of their prey-halibut, cod, and squid. Join Todd McLeish as he travels high above the Arctic circle to meet: Teams of scientific researchers studying the narwhal's life cycle and the mysteries of its tusk; Inuit storytellers and hunters; Animals that share the narwhals' habitat: walruses, polar bears, bowhead and beluga whales, ivory gulls, and two kinds of seals. McLeish consults logbooks kept by whalers and explorers and interviews folklorists and historians to tease out the relationship between the real narwhal and the mythical unicorn. In Colorado, he visits climatologists studying changes in the seasonal cycles of the Arctic ice. From a history of the trade in narwhal tusks to descriptions of narwhals' vocalizations as heard through hydrophones, *Narwhals* reveals the beauty and thrill of the narwhal and its habitat, and the threat it faces from a rapidly changing world.

Book Information

Series: Samuel and Althea Stroum Books

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: University of Washington Press; Reprint edition (August 5, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0295994169

ISBN-13: 978-0295994161

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,141,955 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Ecosystems > Arctic #563 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Marine Life #992 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Mammals

Customer Reviews

Narwhals stand out as a marine mammal of singular mystery, long linked to the unicorn myth and now tracked by scientists eager to learn about migration and breeding behaviors and the purpose

behind their distinctive tusk. McLeish first relates his childhood discovery of the animal via World Book Encyclopedia, then brings us to the Canadian Arctic and Greenland as he recounts time spent on the water among Native hunters and international groups of researchers. As McLeish tries to form a picture of the narwhal's place in the modern world, he quickly discovers there is little consensus on most aspects of the narwhal's existence from current population figures to the impact of global warming on its future (it is likely as imperiled as the polar bear) to the ubiquitous tusk whose monetary value threatens its very existence. After consulting logbooks of nineteenth-century explorers and experiencing narwhal encounters in the frigid north, McLeish provides a broad view of the narwhal's history and legend, remaining awestruck and deeply concerned for a species that remains a miraculous creation. --Colleen Mondor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"As one of the first general-interest books for adults dedicated to the narwhal, it's an important first start. Full of science, story, and some amazing images, *Narwhals* introduces us to the 'sea unicorn's' world." •Elizabeth Bradfield, *Orion* "Anthropology, conservation, biology and local cultural and economic considerations blend effortlessly in this account. Ultimately the reader comes away with a profound awareness of the complications involved in maintaining in perpetuity a long lived species whose behavioral and ecological circumstances ironically leave it vulnerable to anthropogenic perturbations." •Science Book and Film Review, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, September 2013 "His expertise shines in this pithy, entertaining book, which concludes with a sober assessment of the future for this species, one of only three truly Arctic cetaceans, in a warming world." •Kieran Mulvaney, *BBC Wildlife* "Part of the book's strength lies in how McLeish captures the vivid sensory world of the Arctic." •Doug Norris, *Independent RI*, March 2013 "Todd McLeish goes deep into the narwhal • from its mythology to its biology." •Beth Daley, *The Green Blog*, March 2013 "McLeish provides a broad view of the narwhal's history and legend, remaining awestruck and deeply concerned for a species that remains a miraculous creation." •Colleen Mondor, *Booklist* "[The book] is a personal account of the latest scientific findings on narwhals and on ways the Arctic environment is changing. . . . [it] feels like a privilege to see one's favorite study animal portrayed as it has been here in a well-written popular book for a broad audience." •M. P. Heide-Jørgensen, *Quarterly Review of Biology* "Based on interviews with researchers and his own research, McLeish weaves a compelling story about narwhals and the impact of the changing climate on their survival. . . . This book is a great read for general audiences and students as well as scientists interested in narwhals." •Choice

Such an unusual creature, which was fascinating to read about!!!

If it weren't for the four other books I was reading at the same time that were actually interesting (a couple on dolphins, one on belugas, and another on why pluto wasn't a planet anymore by mike brown, which I loved) I probably wouldn't have finished this book. It has some interesting stuff on narwhals interspersed between his way-too-detailed accounts of the trips he took to see narwhals and his boring conversations with experts on ice cores (so fascinating) and other stuff related to narwhals. He also randomly talked about walruses. I thought he would tie this into narwhal tusks somehow but he didn't. He filled some pages with all the birds he saw too. I'm surprised there wasn't a chapter on what he did at all the airports he must have visited. What's his favorite color? Does he like cucumbers? (I don't) I honestly don't think there was enough subject matter to write this book. I thought it would be like Nancy Lord's *Beluga Days*, which is a similar concept (she travels to see belugas and talk with other people who like belugas and throws in interesting facts about belugas here and there), but it wasn't. It appeared to be a lame attempt to create a book like hers but about narwhals. It is unfortunately the only book out there about narwhals (well, at least on). If you see it at the library and have no other options or have some money to blow and need time to kill go for it I guess.

There isn't much on narwhals, so I had high hopes this would be the definitive book. It isn't, but I found lots of interesting detail I had not previously known. The author visited a number of places to talk with experts, native people and others knowledgeable about the animals. He overdoes the interviews and travel details, I think, and I found it got in the way of the narrative flow. This does give a sort of legitimacy to the book, but could have been written about with a lighter hand. Of the places he visited, narwhals seem in best shape in Greenland, but the whales are under pressure there as everywhere else they are found. He writes that the villages don't like to talk about it, but younger hunters sometimes kill narwhals just for the tusk, and at \$150 per foot one can see the rationale. The undercurrent in the book is that the future for narwhals is not good. I had not known the animals can dive so deep. Or live so long. One survey he cites, using eye lenses of narwhals (and therefore the whole animal harvested for use) can give an age for them. The survey showed that 20% of the sample were over fifty and one had lived for about 115 years.

Todd McLeish gives us a great introduction to a striking animal. While most everyone knows about

narwhals, all we remember it for is the tusk. As striking as that tusk or horn is (it's a giant tooth, essentially, but one that grows in a unique spiral pattern), there's a lot more to the animal than that. The author recounts his travels to see narwhals in North America, Greenland, and Iceland. He speaks with biologists, indigenous hunters, and various other folks. Narwhal hunting is legal, though regulated, and the tusks are still prized worldwide by collectors of natural history items. (The tusks cannot be imported legally into the U.S., though a Canadian dealer told the author it could be arranged.) Narwhals are still important sources of meat and muktuk and other useful items in the far North. McLeish attends hunts and, while a confirmed animal lover, is not opposed to controlled hunting in communities where the animal is an important food source and the entire carcass is put to use. The males, we learn, do not use their seven-foot tusks to joust or for defense. They do have an odd habit of raising their tusks into the air in pairs or groups, like knights hoisting their lances after a tournament, and sometimes touching them together. (About one half of one percent of narwhals have two tusks, and occasional tusked females are reported.) McLeish also reports on the controversy about what the tusk is for. It's not for grubbing up food or for breaking through ice. Most cetologists regard it as strictly a sexual display item, like antlers, but a few researchers point to what appear to be nerve channels (this tooth is, compared to your teeth, essentially inside out) and think it has important functions as a sensor probe, testing water temperature and salinity in ways that might help males find females. Narwhals are not endangered, with a population of 80,000 or so, but they face unknown effects from climate change and the accumulation of PCBs and other toxins. They are, McLeish argues convincingly, worth protecting as a part of the Arctic ecosystem and as a species admirably adapted to harsh conditions where even other whales are rare. There are a couple of subjects I hoped the author would touch on to make this a more comprehensive book on the species. One is the hybridization of narwhals and belugas, which is rare but a confirmed fact. The other is the strange reports of narwhals or something like them from the opposite end of the Earth: a southern narwhal, while reported only a couple of times, is still an interesting topic. Despite these small omissions, this is a terrific book. I read it through at one sitting, and and I now know a lot more about these unique cetaceans and their world. Matt BilleAuthor, *Shadows of Existence: Discoveries and Speculations in Zoology* (Hancock House, 2006)[...]

This book read more like a travelogue than an in depth look at these amazing creatures, and depending on what you're looking for this might be the book for you. I was hoping for a little more facts and less of the author's whining about the weather conditions and lack of respect for Inuit people's cultural traditions. However, the book shines a light on the true issue here and that is that

there truly is not enough research done on narwhals to warrant a whole 200 page book. I found the facts and the studies he talked about interesting, but I feel that more research needs to be done on these fascinating creatures so we can give them the good, thorough book they deserve.

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