The Killer Whale (Orca).

The killer whale, also known as an orca (Orcinus orca), is a toothed whale belonging to the oceanic dolphin family, of which it is the largest member. They have a diverse diet and they are apex predators, meaning that they themselves have no natural predators. They are sometimes called the wolves of the sea, because they hunt in groups like wolf packs. Their prey includes fish, mammals, seabirds and sea turtles. Killer whales spend most of their time at shallow depths, but occasionally dive several hundred meters depending on their prey.

Fish

Fish-eating killer whales prey on around 30 species of fish. Some population specialize in herring but salmon account for 96% of northeast Pacific residents' diet. On average, a killer whale eats 227 kilograms each day. While salmon are usually hunted by an individual whale or a small group, herring are often caught using carousel feeding: the killer whales force the herring into a tight ball by releasing bursts of bubbles or flashing their white undersides. They then slap the ball with their tail flukes, stunning or killing up to 15 fish at a time, then eating them one by one. Carousel feeding has only been documented in the Norwegian killer whale population, as well as some oceanic dolphin species.

Killer whales also eat sharks and rays. With sharks, orcas may herd them to the surface and strike them with their tail flukes, while bottom-dwelling rays are cornered, pinned to the ground and taken to the surface. Competition between killer whales...
and white sharks is probable in regions where their diets overlap. The arrival of orcas in an area can cause white sharks to flee and forage elsewhere.

**Mammals and birds**

Killer whales are sophisticated and effective predators of marine mammals. Groups even attack minke whales, grey whales, sperm whales and blue whales. Hunting a large whale usually takes several hours so killer whales generally attack young or weak animals. When hunting a young whale, a group chases it and its mother to exhaustion. Eventually, they separate the pair and surround the calf, drowning it by keeping it from surfacing, and may consume only its jaw and tongue. Pods of female sperm whales sometimes protect themselves by forming a protective circle around their calves with their flukes facing outwards, using them to repel the attackers. Rarely, large killer whale pods can overwhelm even adult female sperm whales. Adult bull sperm whales, which are large, powerful and aggressive when threatened, and fully grown adult blue whales, which are possibly too large to overwhelm, are not believed to be prey for killer whales.

Other marine mammal prey species include nearly 20 species of seal. Often, to avoid injury, killer whales disable their prey before killing and eating it. This may involve throwing it in the air, slapping it with their tails, ramming it, or breaching and landing on it. "Wave-hunting" killer whales "spy-hop" to locate Weddell seals, crabeater seals, leopard seals, and penguins resting on ice floes, and then swim in groups to create waves that wash over the floe. This washes the prey into the water, where other killer whales lie in wait.
The Killer Whale (Orca) Science Comprehension

1. What is another name for a killer whale?

2. Do killer whales eat sea birds?

3. What is an apex predator?

4. Why are orca sometimes known as the wolves of the sea?

5. How many species of fish do fish eating Killer whales prey upon?

6. How do orca eat sharks?

7. How long does it take to hunt and kill a large whale?

8. Which two types of whale are not prey for the orca?

9. How do wave hunting orca spot their prey?

10. How do orca kill seals?

Please record your score out of ten here. Each question is worth one mark.