



*An unusually curious
Loggerhead Turtle.*

Offshore Sea Life ID Guide East Coast

Contents

Introduction	5
Acknowledgments	11
Some Words Explained.	11
Marine Mammals	12
Whales	12
Pilot Whales and Beaked Whales	16
Dolphins	18
Rarer Whales and Dolphins	22
Seabirds	26
Gulls	26
Shearwaters and Petrels	28
Storm-Petrels	32
Alcids	34
Phalaropes	39
Terns	40
Jaegers	42
Skuas	44
Tropicbirds	45
Gannet and Boobies	46
Frigatebird	47
Rarer Seabirds	48
Sea Turtles	50
Flyingfish and Flying Squid	52
Other Fish	55
Billfish and Sharks	56
Other Big Fish	58
Rarer Big Fish	59
Seaweeds	60
Jellyfish and Cousins	61
Landbirds	62
Species Codes, Scientific Names, and Index	63

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Atlantic White-sided Dolphin, Black-capped Petrel, and Sargassum Midget

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Believed extinct by the 1600s, Bermuda Petrel (above) was rediscovered in the 1900s and its nesting grounds were located in 1951. This attractive gadfly petrel has since been the subject of an intensive conservation campaign, and today it is likely that 500 or so birds range over the North Atlantic. Still, the chances of seeing one off the East Coast remain slim.

Abbreviations. To save space we often use four-letter codes for species names; the codes are listed as an index on pp. 63–64. Likewise, standard state abbreviations are used: DE for Delaware, FL Florida, MA Massachusetts, MD Maryland, ME Maine, NC North Carolina, NH New Hampshire, NJ New Jersey, VA Virginia. For months we use 3 letters: Feb for February, Jun for June, etc. North, central, south, etc., are usually abbreviated as n., cen., s., etc. We use the Latin abbreviation ‘cf.’ for ‘compare with.’

We define the Northeast as the Gulf of Maine south to Cape Cod, Massachusetts; the Mid-Atlantic Coast as Long Island, New York, south to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina; and the Southeast as Cape Hatteras south to Florida.

Introduction

What do the following have in common? Humpback Whales lunge-feeding and breaching, snappy-looking Black-capped Petrels wheeling over cobalt blue waters, multicolored flyingfish gliding over glassy seas flecked with golden Sargassum weed. Well, for the most part, you can’t see them from shore. You’ll need to experience these offshore wonders on a boat trip, often called a ‘pelagic trip’ by birdwatchers.

This identification guide uses plates of composite photos to help you identify offshore marine wildlife—‘things you see at sea,’ be they whales, birds, dolphins, turtles, sharks, or flyingfish. Short accounts distill the essence of identification—wildlife views at sea can be brief, and the less time you spend reading a book the better. Once you have a name, numerous other resources are available to help you learn more about the creatures that inhabit the oceans. But that all-important handle, a species name, is the first step in the cascade of knowledge.

We focus on species seen on day trips off the East Coast (Maine to central Florida; see map inside back cover), not those found far offshore in waters few people get to visit. Some species we include can be seen from shore but are also found offshore, and are usually considered as marine creatures. We don’t include coastal birds such as most gulls, terns, cormorants, sea ducks, loons, grebes, or even some ‘marine’ mammals (they’re called *Harbor Seals* for a reason; below); even though you may see these from boats they can all be watched more easily from shore. We also do not include real rarities, species you might never see even on 100 trips, such as a Bermuda Petrel (opposite).



Gray Seals (the 2 larger, longer-nosed animals near front) and Harbor Seals are inshore and coastal animals, seen on rocky headlands and islands, not truly offshore creatures.