

The Inupiat houses are now made of wood and stone instead of bones. Photos courtesy of Terry Feuerborn, Flickr.com.



## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

But the changes kept coming. In the 1970s, rising seawater chased the Inupiat from their homes at the edge of the sea. They built new homes, farther inland. The Inupiat used wood and stone instead of whale bones. Today, the Inupiat way of life is changing again. Temperatures in the Arctic are rising. We call this global warming or climate change, and it means that the bowhead whales are harder to find than ever before. Bowhead whales feed on tiny animals called **zooplankton**. Zooplankton live near the edge of the sea ice that covers the Arctic Ocean. But as temperatures in the Arctic go up, the ice melts. The zooplankton follow the shrinking ice, and the bowheads follow the zooplankton.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE



<http://beyondpenguins.nsd.org>

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



#### Stephen Whitt

Director of Experience Programs  
Teaching and Learning COSI

Stephen Whitt has been with COSI since 1993, performing shows and demonstrations, writing exhibit signs and show scripts, and co-directing COSI's floor faculty. He has written over 40 articles for children's science magazines, and his first book, called *The Turtle and the Universe* was published by Prometheus Books in 2008.

Find this story and others at:

<http://beyondpenguins.nsd.org/information.php?topic=stories>

### Issue 20: Climate Change and the Polar Regions (June 2010)

Copyright February 2009 – The Ohio State University

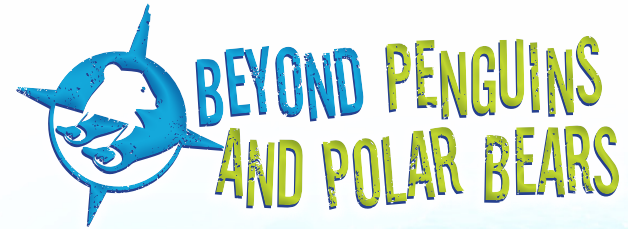


Supported by the National  
Science Foundation

Licensed Under a Creative Commons license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

Flesch - Kincaid RL = 5.2

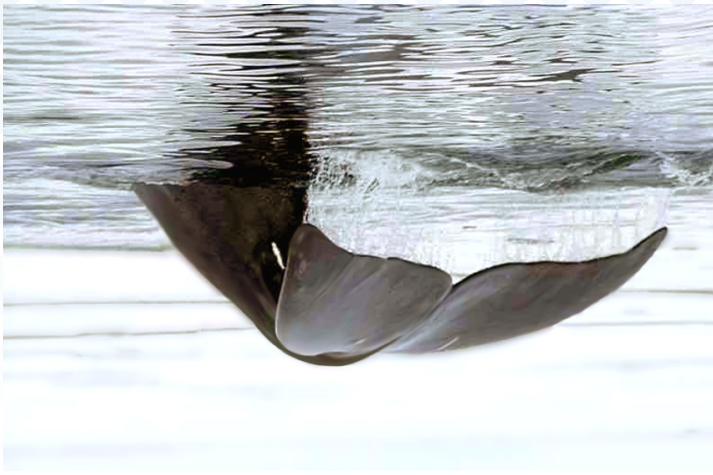


## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

BY STEPHEN WHITT

JUNE 2010

A bowhead whale.  
Photo courtesy  
of Ansgar Walk,  
Wikimedia  
Commons.



## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

### GLOSSARY

**HARPOONS** — spears used in hunting whales and large fish

**ZOOPLANKTON** — floating organisms, such as krill, found in the oceans

Then changes came. First, large whaling ships from the south came for the whales. Whalers from Europe and the United States killed bowheads, one after another after another. Soon the whales became scarce. By the time commercial whaling ended, the whales were almost gone. For a short time, even the Inupiat hunt stopped. But small groups, hunting as they had for hundreds of years, finally resumed the hunt.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE



The Inupiat live along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Map courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

### PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

The Inupiat hunters find themselves traveling farther and farther to find whales. The trips become more dangerous. The weather is harder to predict. When the hunters return to land, the shore ice is not as strong as it once was. This makes pulling the whales from the water more difficult and dangerous than before.

There are other threats, as well. The North Shore of Alaska is rich not just in whales and their food but also in oil. The oil is buried beneath the ocean floor. It is often right below the bowhead's migration path. As the ice melts in the Arctic, drilling for oil becomes easier. Oil exploration threatens to drive the whales even farther from shore.

The Inupiat of Alaska's Northwest Coast sometimes call themselves the "people of the whale." The whale they mean is the bowhead whale of the Arctic Ocean. To the Inupiat, the bowheads are life itself. For hundreds of years, the Inupiat lived along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. They built their houses from the jawbones of the whales. They lived by the rhythms of the sea. Each year, they awaited the migration of the whales.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

### PEOPLE OF THE WHALE



This drawing from the 18th century shows Dutch ships hunting the whales. Illustration courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.





Two women share blubber from a bowhead whale, which is a delicacy. Photo courtesy of Ansgar Walk, Wikimedia Commons.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

Still, the Inupiat are adapting. They are finding new ways to hunt the whales. They are adopting new techniques. They are learning to live with new realities. They are doing what the Inupiat have always done. As the ice melts, they remain dedicated to their way of life, and to the whales they cherish.

In some places in the world, people still argue about whether climate change is real. The People of the Whale live with climate change every day.

When the whales arrived, the Inupiat paddled small boats out into the sea. They carried **harpoons** of stone and bone. They used these tools to kill the animal they cherish above all others. When the hunters returned to shore, the entire community helped to pull the whale up onto land and butcher it. Everyone shared in the meat. And the jawbones became the walls of their houses.

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE

## PEOPLE OF THE WHALE



Above: Illustration of men hunting bowhead whales with spears. Courtesy of Travis S., Flickr.com.

Left: Bowhead whale bones . Photo courtesy of rnoblin, Flickr.com