

All Tangled Up

Background

Approximately **80% of North Atlantic right whales exhibit scars from entanglements** in fishing gear. Entanglements, as well as ship strikes, are the leading causes of North Atlantic right whale deaths. Entanglements happen most often in fishing gear that is set and left unattended in the water for a while as it catches its fish, lobster, or crabs in **traps**. Sometimes this fishing gear gets damage and lost at sea where it can't be collected by its owner, but can entangle whales or other marine life. At that point it is considered a form of marine debris and can lead to suffocation, starvation, drowning, increased risk for predators, or other injury. In 2018, the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) estimated that more than **800 marine species are affected by marine debris** (2019 ICC Annual Report, Ocean Conservancy). Between fishing gear still being used and marine debris, whales can get pretty tangled up in their ocean homes.

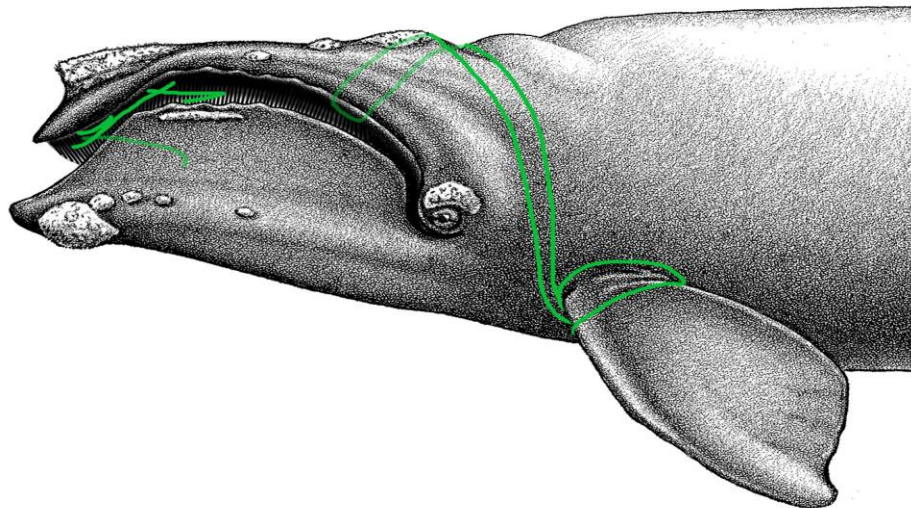


Image by Scott Landry, Center for Coastal Studies

Check out [this simulation video](#) to see how North Atlantic right whales get entangled in fishing gear.

Based on curriculum from Project Oceanography 1999.

North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium Education Committee.

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Activity Objective

This fast activity is a simple way to learn what life may be like for entangled North Atlantic right whale. Could you get yourself untangled if you were caught in rope or marine debris?

Materials

Rubber bands

Activity

1. First, hold your hands up in front of your face, with the back of your hands towards your face.
2. Hold the rubber band in your right hand and hook one end of it over the little finger of your left hand.
3. Hook the other end of the rubber band over the left-hand thumb. The rubber band should be taut and resting across the bottom knuckles on the back of your left hand.
4. Place your right hand behind your back and keep it there. You can also sit on your right hand if you are tempted to use it.
5. Try to free your hand of the rubber band without using your right hand, teeth, face, or rubbing it on anything.
6. Give yourself 2 minutes to see if you can get the rubber band off your hand.



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Wrap Up

After you are done, imagine what it is like for a North Atlantic right whale that has gotten wrapped up in a section of fishing rope, abandoned net, or other debris.

- How would you feel after struggling like this all morning?
- How would you feel after missing breakfast?
- What would happen if you continued to miss meals and spend all of your strength fighting to get free?
- Would you be able to care for your young, surface for air or swim?



Photo: Katie Jackson, FWC, taken under NOAA Fisheries Permit #932-1905/MA-009526

This is scary to think about but there is some good news! Teams of scientists are working with fishermen to develop a new kind of fishing called **ropeless fishing**. Ropeless fishing removes the buoy lines that let fishermen know where their lobster and crab traps are to be able to haul them up to the fishing boat. Instead, they can send an acoustic signal when they are close to their traps to have them float back up to the surface where they can be removed right away. Removing this line from the water would dramatically reduce or eliminate whale entanglements. To learn more visit www.ropeless.org or view a demonstration of one version of this technology [here](#).

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