

## Orca — Arlluk

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### ARLLUT KUIMARTUT IMARMI. – ORCAS ARE SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN.

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Photo: Orca swims in the channel between Kodiak and Near Island.

The orca or killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) is the largest member of the dolphin family. These large, toothed sea mammals are aggressive hunters known for their feeding habits. In addition to fish and squid, killer whales will eat other whales, sea lions, seals, and even birds. Adult orcas grow to between twenty-three and twenty-seven feet long and weigh up to ten tons. They are easily identified by their prominent dorsal fin and distinctive black and white markings, with a white spot behind each eye, a white lower jaw, and a white stomach.

Killer whales live in all the world's oceans. In Alaska, they frequent waters over the continental shelf from southeast Alaska to the Chukchi and Beaufort seas, moving northward in the spring as sea ice retreats and south in the fall as the ice advances. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game reports that there are about one hundred killer whales living in the area encompassing the Kodiak Archipelago and the Shumigan Islands.

According to Alutiiq legend, killer whales are people who have turned into spirits. A story from the Alaska Peninsula tells of a group of mountain people who became killer whales by putting on whale skins. To go hunting, the whale people dove into a smoking, bubbling, mountain lake to reach the ocean. On the coast, there was a village where the residents were lazy and played *kaataq* all day. One day, dressed as people, the killer whales entered the men's house and challenged the villagers to a game of *kaataq*. When the villagers lost the match, the whale people took them to the mountains, killing everyone but two old couples whom they left to tell the story.