Biggest animal in the world: the blue whale, and the dinosaur that rivals it

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The biggest animal in the world is the blue whale: NOAA Fisheries gives it up to 33.5 metres (110 feet) long and 150,000 kilograms (about 330,000 pounds). Peabody's blue whale page goes further and calls it the biggest animal that has ever lived, bigger than any dinosaur. There's one dinosaur that gets close, and it makes a good story about what "biggest" means.

Here is how the giants stack up on Peabody's Animals pages, with the source for every number.

Biggest three ways

"Biggest" can mean heaviest, longest or tallest, and different animals win each.

- Animal: Blue whale · Length: up to 33.5 m (110 ft), the largest Antarctic blue whales · Weight: 150,000 kg (about 330,000 lb) · Where it came from: NOAA Fisheries
- Animal: Argentinosaurus · Length: more than 36.6 m (120 ft) · Weight: up to 100,000 kg (about 220,000 lb) · Where it came from: Smithsonian educator's guide, scientists' estimate
- Animal: Whale shark · Length: 12.2 m (40 ft), the most by some estimates · Weight: 36,000 kg (about 79,000 lb) · Where it came from: NOAA National Ocean Service
- Animal: T. rex · Length: 12.2 to 13.1 m (40 to 43 ft) · Weight: up to 8 to 9 tons · Where it came from: USDA Forest Service
- Animal: Asian elephant · Length: no checked length yet · Weight: 2,750 to 5,420 kg (about 6,100 to 12,000 lb) · Where it came from: Smithsonian's National Zoo

Heaviest: the blue whale. It is about one and a half times Argentinosaurus's estimate, and more than 27 times the heaviest Asian elephant figure.

Longest: by the numbers, Argentinosaurus, at more than 36.6 metres, about three metres past the blue whale's 33.5. But read the next section before you decide.

Tallest: the giraffe. Wikidata, quoting its own reference, gives a standing height of 5.5 metres (18 feet).

Why the dinosaur is an estimate

Peabody's Argentinosaurus page says scientists have found only some of its bones, including back bones bigger than a person. They work out the rest by comparing with better-known cousins, so its size is an estimate. That is why the table says "more than" and "up to", and why a living, measured animal like the blue whale gets to wear the crown.

The blue whale is also the better story for a child. A blue whale has no teeth. It eats with baleen, which works like a giant sieve for krill, and its calls are among the loudest sounds any animal makes.

See them at true size

Compare Two draws both animals to the same ruler, standing next to a child about 1.2 metres tall. Try Argentinosaurus vs blue whale, Asian elephant vs blue whale, blue whale vs giraffe and blue whale vs whale shark. The blue whale vs T. rex page lines up the biggest whale with a famous dinosaur. If you want a post that is only about the whale, there's how big is a blue whale compared to a human.

The biggest land animal

On land, the biggest is the African elephant. The Smithsonian's Africa's Elephant Kingdom educator guide says adult males can grow to 13 feet (4 metres) tall and weigh 12,000 pounds (about 5,440 kilograms), just ahead of the Asian elephant's top figure from the National Zoo. Among the dinosaurs, Argentinosaurus is Peabody's biggest. See the heaviest animals Top 10, the longest animals Top 10 and the biggest dinosaurs Top 10.

Try tonight

Pace out 33.5 metres (110 feet) in a park or along a hall: that's the longest blue whale NOAA lists, and about 28 of Peabody's 1.2-metre children lying head to toe. Then play the size sorter, where three animals appear and you tap them from smallest to biggest. The bigger or smaller quiz is a calmer version, and the how big is that, really guide explains how the drawings stay to scale.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is the blue whale bigger than any dinosaur?

In weight, yes: its 150,000 kilograms is more than Argentinosaurus's estimated 100,000. In length, the dinosaur's estimate is the longer one. Peabody's blue whale page says it is bigger than any dinosaur that ever lived, and the numbers fit that for weight.

What is the biggest fish?

The whale shark. NOAA's National Ocean Service gives it up to 12.2 metres (40 feet) by some estimates. It is a fish, so it breathes with gills, and it eats tiny plankton. A whale is a mammal and breathes air, which is why the is a shark a fish guide exists.

Why does the page say "no checked number yet" for some giants?

Because Peabody shows a number only when it can point to the page it came from. A gap is better than a guess.

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