The narwhal’s tusk is ivory, which means it’s actually a tooth.

There’s a whole ocean of mysteries about the narwhal, one of nature’s most fascinating animals. The “unicorn of the sea” holds many secrets; perhaps the following list will help to demystify this amazing creature!

Adult narwhals develop white spots and splotches as they age—hence the etymology of “narwhal” from Norwegian, “corpse whale,” after the look of drowned sailors.

Narwhals cannot survive in captivity.

Narwhals can live up to 100 years, but the average age is about 60 years.

A narwhal can weigh up to 1.5 tons.

Narwhals are whales but are also closely related to dolphins. Their closest relative is a beluga.

Narwhals can dive about a mile deep.

Polar bears and orcas are the narwhal’s biggest natural predators.

Only Inuit are legally allowed to hunt the narwhal.

The function of the tusk is still not entirely understood, but scientists think that it is to navigate and sense changes in the environment.

Compiled by Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C.
A narwhal is made of about 40% blubber. The Inuit use narwhal blubber as an important source of vitamin C. It has been a staple in the Inuit diet and culture for centuries.

A narwhal consumes about 66 pounds of food per day. Due to climate change, narwhals have begun to reproduce with belugas, although it is rare. This new animal is called a narluga.

The tusk continuously grows but growth slows as a narwhal ages. Females only give birth to calves once every three years, and pregnancy lasts 14 months.

Only about 5% of female narwhals have tusks. It’s possible for a male narwhal to have two tusks.

The tusk of the narwhal helps them use echolocation to navigate. Narwhals are not fast movers at about only four miles per hour.

Narwhals have a second tooth, but it usually remains embedded in the skull. Narwhals eat things like halibut, cod, squid, and shrimp.

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