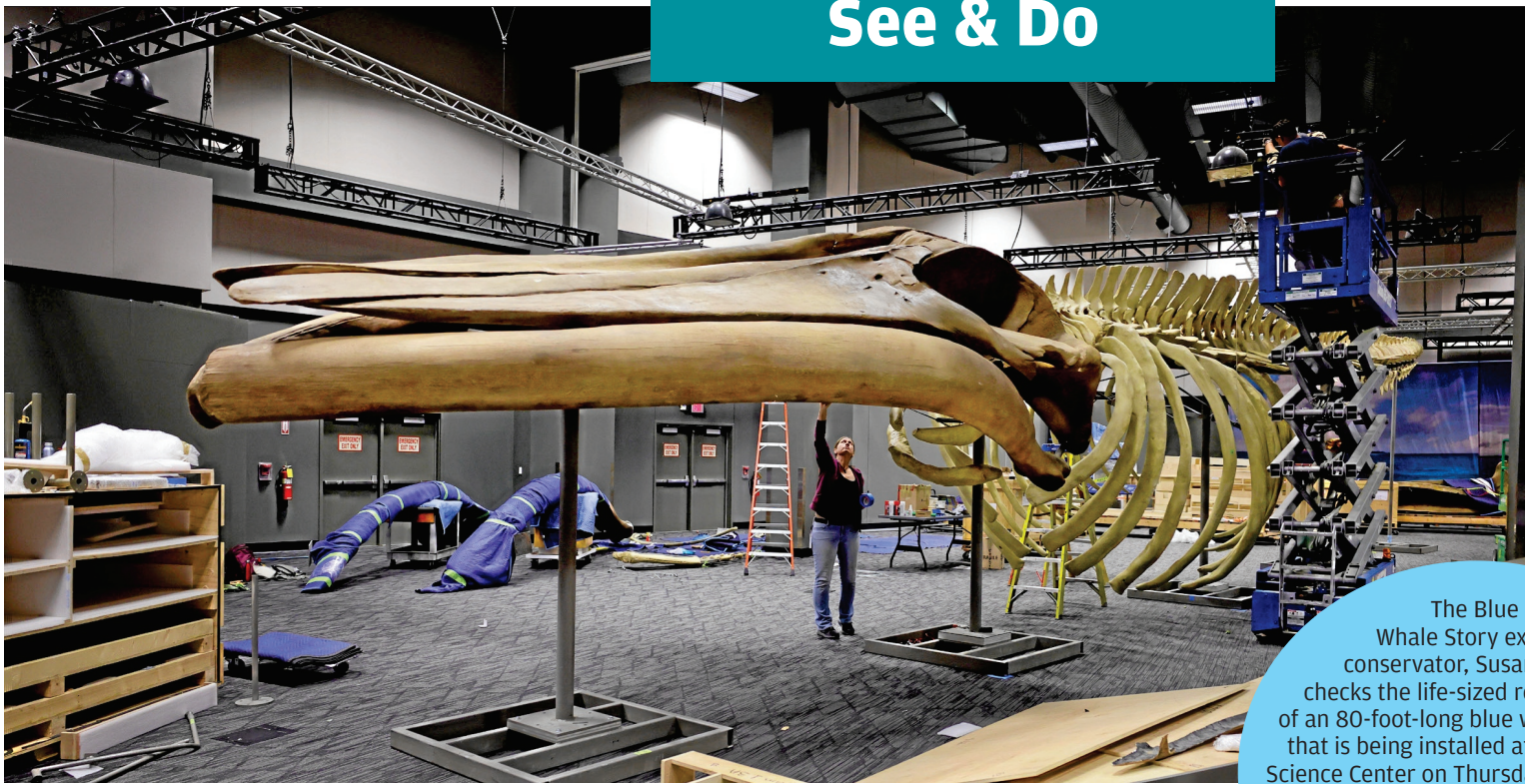


See & Do



If you go

What: “The Blue Whale Story”

When: Thursdays-Mondays, May 23-Jan. 10 (the Science Center will be open Wednesdays beginning June 3 and lasting through the summer)

Where: St. Louis Science Center, 5050 Oakland Blvd.

How much: \$16, \$14 for seniors (60 and older) and military, \$12 children 5-12, \$8 members. Free for children 4 and under, but they must have a ticket to enter

More info: slsc.org/attraction/the-blue-whale-story

The Blue Whale Story exhibit conservator, Susan Green, checks the life-sized reproduction of an 80-foot-long blue whale skeleton that is being installed at the St. Louis Science Center on Thursday, May 7, 2026. The Blue Whale Story exhibition at the St. Louis Science Center opens to the public on May 23 and will be on display until Jan. 10, 2027.

DAVID CARSON,
POST-DISPATCH

With only around 20,000 left in the world, blue whales are on the endangered list. The whaling industry killed the vast majority of them, and even today some are killed by being hit by ships or becoming tangled in fishing gear, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The last section of the exhibition looks into the future for blue whales and explores what we can do to help them, Eskew says.

Among the scientists conducting research into the field is Jean Potvin and his colleagues at St. Louis University. Potvin is the center’s scientist-in-residence throughout the length of the exhibition, which ends in January, and he will participate in presentations about it. He will also be on hand at the exhibition on occasion to talk about it and answer questions.

Potvin and his team are not only studying whales to help save the species, but they are also looking at how whales can help save mankind. One thing they have developed is a filter system based on whale baleen.

They are using it now to remove microplastics from waterways.

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That new blue whale exhibition at the Science Center?

IT'S BIG

BY DANIEL NEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

When blue whales poop, their reddish-orange waste floats to the top of the ocean and forms a kind of lake of whale excrement. It becomes algae, and plankton feed off it. Then, other fish eat the plankton.

It’s all part of the circle of life.

Of all the many facts presented in “The Blue Whale Story,” a special exhibition opening May 23 at the St. Louis Science Center, that ones about whale poop are likely to resonate the most with young visitors and certain older ones.

The exhibition’s actual focus, and the reason it exists at all, is an enormous replica of the skeleton of a specific blue whale, which dominates the room. Visitors can walk all the way around it, and

under part of the tale, to get a full understanding of its size and bone structure, says Kaylia Eskew, the center’s manager of special exhibitions.

The skeleton model was cast from a real blue whale, now named Blue, who was trapped under the ice near Newfoundland along with eight other whales in 2014.

They all died. But out of this tragedy came an almost unprecedented opportunity to study blue whales, who usually die far from the shore and out of the reach of humans.

When they die, they sink to the ocean floor. There, the massive bodies feed a variety of other animal life for a long time, and coral has been shown to grow on the bones.

It’s another part of the circle

of life.

Blue whales are the largest animals ever to roam the earth, about 1½ times the size of the larger dinosaurs, Eskew says. At 80 feet long, Blue was actually a little smaller than some, which can reach 110 feet and weigh around 200,000 pounds.

Even at birth, they weigh 6 to 7 tons, and they gain 10 pounds a day from drinking their mother’s milk — and a lot of it. The exhibition includes a nearly 4-foot-tall milk carton representing the 225 liters of nutrient-rich milk a whale calf consumes in a single day.

Another part of the exhibition includes a scale so you can see how many versions of yourself it would take to be as big as a blue whale.

Along another wall is an exhibit that may come as a surprise.

“Blue whales were once land animals, which I think is absolutely fascinating,” Eskew says.

This section shows replica skeletons clearly demonstrating the evolution of a four-legged land animal that lived by the water into the blue whale that we know today. The front legs eventually become flippers while the hind legs disappear almost entirely, though the skeleton of Blue still has a couple of vestigial bones left over from when

they had legs.

The fierce-looking teeth also disappear, replaced by stiff, curtain-like baleen, which are used to filter out seawater and trap the tiny krill that it eats. And the blue whale eats a lot of krill, up to 40 million of the reddish-orange crustaceans a day.

Though their throats are relatively small, blue whales’ jaws are enormous. Part of the exhibition is a replica of an open set of jaws just waiting for people to stand inside and have their pictures taken.

Nearby is a replica of a blue whale’s blowhole, which looks like a very large nose. Whales are mammals, so they need to breathe air. They usually wait around 15 minutes to come to the surface to take another breath, but they can wait around 30 minutes if they have dived especially deep, Eskew says.

There is also a replica of a whale heart, which resembles a human heart but is much bigger. Blue whales have the largest hearts of any animal, and Eskew compares this one to the size of a bumper car.