

LAST OF THE RIGHT WHALES

Logline

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Synopsis (500 characters)

North Atlantic right whales are dying faster than they can reproduce. With just over 330 remaining, these great whales rarely die of natural causes. Instead they are run over by ships or suffer lethal injuries from fishing gear. With unprecedented access to film the right whale migration from their calving ground off the coast of Florida to their shifting feeding grounds in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, LAST OF THE RIGHT WHALES brings a message of hope about a great whale on the brink of extinction.

Synopsis (1,000 characters)

North Atlantic right whales are dying faster than they can reproduce. With just over 330 remaining, these great whales rarely die of natural causes. Instead they are run over by ships or suffer lethal injuries from fishing gear. If we don't stop killing them, in 20 years they could be extinct. With unprecedented access to film the whale migration from the only known calving grounds to the shifting feeding grounds, LAST OF THE RIGHT WHALES follows the right whale migration and the people committed to saving a species still struggling to recover from centuries of hunting. Now climate change is forcing these great whales further north in search of food, putting them on a collision course with deadly ships and fishing gear. Featuring breathtaking footage of the majestic but rarely seen North Atlantic right whale - as observed through the eyes of scientists, photographers, rescuers and fishermen - we bear witness to their struggle and bring hope for their survival.

LAST OF THE RIGHT WHALES follows the North Atlantic right whale's 1,600 km migration as observed through the eyes of scientists tracking their long journey of survival in a rapidly changing world. In each critical habitat - coastal Florida, Cape Cod Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence - scientists joined by fishers, photographers and rescuers are on a quest to discover what these great whales need to reproduce, nourish and travel in hazardous waters.

The right whale's journey begins in January in the shallow coastal waters off the southeastern seaboard of the United States. From Cape Fear to Cape Canaveral is the only known calving area for right whales to birth and nurse their young. Biologist Barb Zoodsma and her team must identify and catalogue the handful of calves born each year. They are the guardians of the next generation. A first-time mother, Snow Cone, and her calf are central characters as their lives become a dramatic illustration of why right whales are facing extinction.

By March the whales are moving north to their prime feeding ground in Cape Cod Bay. From his hometown on the tip of the cape, Charles 'Stormy' Mayo leads a research team sampling the plankton blooms that are attracting a growing percentage of the population. The foremost expert on right whale prey, Mayo worries the increasing numbers of right whales coming to Cape Cod means the offshore habitats are failing. Will there be enough food in a warming ocean for right whales to survive?

From Cape Cod the whales continue north, bypassing their old feeding ground in the Bay of Fundy, to arrive in the Gulf of St. Lawrence by early May. Building on Mayo's work, Canadian oceanographer Kim Davies leads a research team to identify what right whales are eating in this new and unprotected habitat. If Davies can discover how the whales are using this increasingly important feeding area, measures can be taken to prevent entanglements and ship strikes.

Davie's research vessel is captained by Martin Noël, one of the few fishermen testing pop-up fishing gear. Before embarking with the scientists, Noël will test crab pots equipped with an acoustic release that floats a line to the surface. By removing fixed vertical ropes from the ocean, this cutting edge technology has the potential to eliminate the leading cause of right whale deaths. On their research cruise the scientists and Noël come across a right whale becoming entangled. It's the first time anyone has seen this tragedy unfold.

Researchers believe lack of imagery is the biggest obstacle to saving the right whale. Protection measures prohibit diving with right whales but wildlife photographer Nick Hawkins wants to capture underwater footage using a remotely controlled camera. A biologist by training and a former whale watching guide, Hawkins is on a quest to create powerful images that can help save the species.

With the right whale as the film's central character LAST OF THE RIGHT WHALES combines stunning aerial and underwater cinematography with character-driven, vérité storytelling. Filming alongside researchers and rescuers, permitted to approach within metres of these 60-ton whales, offers an unrivaled look at a rarely seen animal.