

NEWSLETTER OF THE PUGET SOUND CHAPTER
OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 2

SPRING 2004

Next Meeting
May 19th
Anna Hall -
“Holidaying Harbor
Porpoise”

Harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) occur year round in the waters of southern British Columbia, but little is known about their seasonal abundance, habitat use and food habits. A marine survey was undertaken to

(Continued on page 4)

Event Information

All speaker series events meet on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at the Phinney Neighborhood Center, Room 6, 6532 Phinney Ave. N., Seattle, just north of the Woodland Park Zoo. Doors open at 7pm and the program starts at 7:30pm. Plenty of free parking is available in the upper and lower parking lots. Admission is free—donations are gratefully appreciated.

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Chapter Currents

by Uko Gorter, ACS/PS President

Along with Spring, and the quickening pace of life in the higher latitudes, we also have some new energy on our chapter board. We are delighted to welcome Darcie Larson, to the ACS/PS board.

Darcie is the Administrative Manager/Development Associate with Save Our Wild Salmon, a coalition of groups championing for the removal of the dams in the lower Snake river. She gave a highly informative and interesting presentation on that topic at our meeting in March of this year. She has also interned with the Whale Museum and Sound Watch in Friday Harbor. Darcie joins our board as

our new fundraising chair. If you are interested in becoming involved with our chapter, please let us know. You don't have to be an expert on whales or dolphins. We do need enthusiastic folks who are willing to commit a bit of extra time. Of course it helps being passionate about cetaceans.

The Puget Sound Chapter of the American Cetacean Society needs your help more than ever. In order to continue to bring awareness of the plight of whales and dolphins to our community, to keep funding research done in our local waters and in disadvantaged countries in the world, and

(Continued on page 7)

Green Concert for a Blue Planet

Please join us for a fabulous, fun-filled, fundraising concert **Sunday June 13th** hosted by the City Cantabile Choir and the Puget Sound Chapter of ACS. This concert will be a feast for your eyes and ears.

Some of the groups the concert proceeds benefit are People for Puget Sound, Save Our Wild Salmon, ACS/PS (us!) and The City Cantabile Choir.

The program features a multi-talented group of singers and musicians:

- Members of the Children of the Revolution
- The City Cantabile Choir conducted by Fred West.

- Paula Maya, a Brazilian singer, songwriter and great Keyboardist.
- Trina Willard, a super talented singer-songwriter with her back up trio.

(Continued on page 3)

OrcaSing 2004

The Sixth Annual OrcaSing by the City Cantabile Choir directed by Fred West and co-sponsored by ACS/PS, will be held on **Saturday, June 19, @ 7pm**, at Lime Kiln Park on San Juan Island.

This tribute to our beloved orcas has been featured in CBS' 60 minutes.



Vashon Hydrophone Project (VHP) Update

by Ann Stateler, VHP Coordinator

When ACS/PS installed the Vashon hydrophone in January 2004, we anticipated we would collect acoustic data on the Southern Resident killer whales for another six to eight weeks. Since I started collaborating with VHP associate researcher Mark Sears in 1994, we have documented Southern Residents, J, K, and L Pods, visiting central Puget Sound annually between September and March. Some years they have appeared as early as August or as late as April.

The Southern Residents continually surprise me. All three pods broke their pattern of the last seven years and departed central Puget Sound by early January this year. Mark and I had no confirmed sightings in our area after January 9.

We monitor the hydrophone continuously. I am confident Southern Residents did not slip by the VHP site undetected. In the absence of orca vocalizations, we are keeping an ear out, so to speak, for interesting recording opportunities: perhaps a gray whale or Dall's porpoises.

We will be prepared for next season. The Vashon Hydrophone Project (VHP) provides a valuable tool for Puget Sound orca studies. The VHP will help us learn more about the winter distribution, travel, and foraging areas of our endangered Southern Resident killer whales. This underwater microphone is the *first and only hydrophone in Puget Sound dedicated to Southern Resident orca recovery, research, and conservation!*

We are grateful to Richard Rogers for donating a color printer to the VHP. The VHP requires funding to develop our educational component, for maintenance, and future expansion. See our wish list below.

ACS/PS and VHP wish list:

- A laptop computer for our educational programs
- LCD (PowerPoint) projector
- An ultrasound interface that will allow us to better monitor and record sounds twice as high as humans can hear; e.g., sounds from porpoises and higher frequencies produced by orcas.

Check our web site, www.acspugetsound.org, for more VHP information and updates.

To support the VHP with tax deductible donations, please write checks to:

ACS/Puget Sound Chapter, specify VASHON HP in memo section, and send to: ACS/Puget Sound Chapter, P.O. Box 17136, Seattle, WA 98127-0836. Thank you!

Whulj
"the saltwater we know"

The Newsletter of
the Puget Sound Chapter
of the American Cetacean Society



P.O. Box 17136
Seattle, WA 98127-0836
206-781-4860
info@acspugetsound.org

ACS/PS Board

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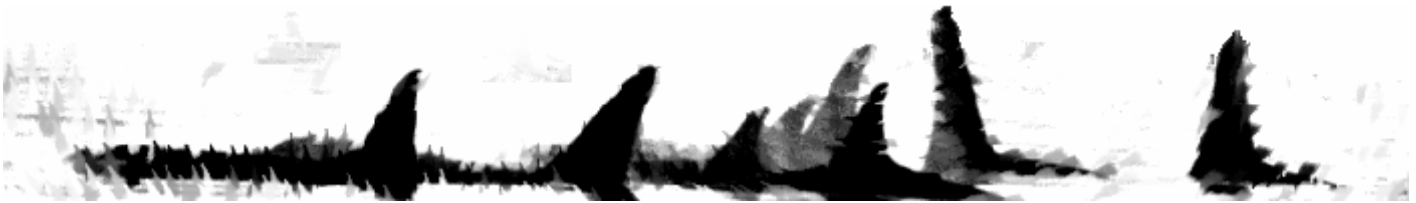
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Dr. David Bain, Dr. Robin Baird, John Calambokidis,
Dr. Marilyn Dahlheim, Dr. John Ford, Dr. Richard Osborne,
Dr. Adam Pack, and Dr. Peter Ross

Whulj publication schedule: February, May, August, November
Editor - Diane Allen, diane@ArtemisComputing.com - 360-437-1303
46 Village Way, ste 171, Port Ludlow WA 98365



Killer Whales Listed as Endangered Species in Washington State

by Ann Stateler, Conservation Chair

In April, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission voted unanimously to list killer whales as a state endangered species. The "Washington State Status Report for the Killer Whale," by Gary J. Wiles of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), cited several major threats to Washington's killer whales, especially the Southern Residents. These threats are from:

- Depleted prey resources, mainly salmon
- Contamination from persistent bioaccumulative toxins, mostly PCBs and DDT residues
- Oil spills
- Interference with foraging and other adverse behavioral impacts from the recent proliferation of commercial and private whale watching boats.

The report deems these threats "unlikely to diminish in the future." The Southern Resident killer whale population fell by nearly 20% between 1995 and 2001, from 99 to just 80 orcas. Researchers noted this unprecedented decline resulted from poor survival rates of whales across age groups and sexes.

Since the Center for Whale Research started its annual Orca Survey in 1974, J and K Pods have increased slightly from 15 and 14 members to 22 and 21 members in 2003, respectively. L Pod has plummeted, from a peak of 59 in 1993 to 41 contributing members in 2003, just two more than in 1974.

"Because of the combination of low population numbers, the recent steep decline in L Pod, and continued threats to the

population, the Department believes that killer whales in Washington, predominantly the Southern Residents, are at risk of extinction from all or a significant portion of their range in Washington and recommends that the species be listed as endangered in the state," concludes WDFW's report.

Visit WDFW's web site at <http://wdfw.wa.gov> to see the report or order a copy of it. NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) is also conducting a Southern Resident status review for a federal Endangered Species Act listing. Their review will be completed in December.

Can you hear me now?

local researchers featured in current issue of
the highly respected magazine, *Nature*

review by Uko Gorter

Ever noticed how more and more folks feel the need to yell through their cellular phones? Even when they're in a quiet environment. Has increased noise levels around us made us raise our voices? Well, something similar seems to be happening to our well-known Southern Resident Killer Whales, although they've perfected wireless communication long before we did.

Andrew Foote, of the University of Durham, UK, and recipient of our chapter's 2004 grants award; **Richard Osborne**, of the Whale Museum in Friday Harbor, WA; and **Rus Hoelzel**, also of the University of Durham, have published their recent findings in the April 29 issue of *Nature* magazine.

They studied the vocalizations of the Southern Resident killer whale community recorded over three different periods. But a 15% increase of the duration of their calls was only noticed in the most recent recordings (2001-2003), when boats were present. The last decade has seen a tremendous increase in vessel noise, due in part by an influx of whale watching activity. The whales seemed to have lengthened their calls once these human-caused noises reached critical levels. The study did not have data to determine if their calls became louder.

While number of vessels involved with whale watching has increased, the Southern Resident killer whale community has declined since 1996. They are currently listed as "depleted" under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and listed as "endangered" by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Source: Andrew D. Foote, Richard W. Osborne, and A. Rus Hoelzel, *Whale-call response to masking boat noise*, *Nature*, p.910, Vol 428, 29 April 2004

Green Concert for a Blue Planet

(Continued from page 1)

The concert will take place at the **Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Church** on **Sunday, June 13, from 7 pm to 9:30 pm.**

14724 1st Ave NE Shoreline, WA 98155

Directions: take the 145th st exit off the I-5- go west 1 block to 1 st Ave N. E turn right --go 3 blocks. You will see the geodesic domed church on your right. There is ample parking in the church's lot.

Tickets are \$ 14.00. to order yours call the Puget Sound Chapter of the American Cetacean Society at 206-781-4860



Luna Update from OrcaLab

Solitary orca Luna doing well in Nootka Sound New fish farms could threaten “natural” reunion

from May 6, 2004 press release by
Dr. Paul Spong/Helena Symonds

A research project conducted over the past two months has been observing Luna, the orca whale who has been living alone in Nootka Sound for nearly 3 years, with a view to assessing his behavior in the absence of summertime recreational vessels. The OrcaLab study has the approval of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation and operates under a Scientific License issued by Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). The project is supported by a coalition of Canadian and US non governmental organizations. Results show Luna to be a normal orca fully capable of managing on his own.

“Luna is a great hunter and is certainly able to make a living by himself,” said OrcaLab's director Dr. Paul Spong. “He sounds like a normal orca and in most respects he behaves like a normal orca; he even has a social life though it's an odd one in that it's with sea lions and not other orcas. He knows every detail of the scene in Nootka Sound. Were it not for the summer boating season Luna would be fine living on his own and could take his own time finding his way back to his orca community.”

The problem for Luna is that summer is coming. By the end of June Nootka Sound will again be crowded with recreational vessels. On them will be many people who want to see Luna, and among them some who want to engage Luna as if he were a pet

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Symposium on Cetacean Systematics

by Uko Gorter

As our Southern Resident Killer Whales are declining in numbers, a recent consideration to list our beloved orcas as “endangered species” federally hinges on poorly understood taxonomic relationships with other killer whales worldwide.

Killer whales are one of the most cosmopolitan marine mammals in the world. However, they are currently listed as a single species, *Orcinus orca*. The question of how many species or sub-species exist is not only interesting scientifically, but also from a conservation stand point. Understanding the different forms and ecology is important regarding our impact on the many distinct populations of killer whales.

The recently held symposium on Cetacean Systematics in April 28-29 at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, La Jolla, CA, should go a long way in understanding our shortcomings of taxonomic relationships of all whales and dolphins. We hope to update you on that meeting in our next Whulj.

May 19th—Anna Hall— “Holidaying Harbor Porpoise”

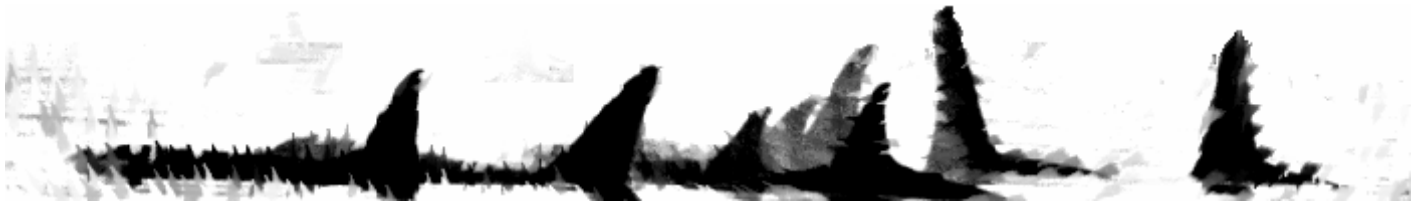
(Continued from page 1)

quantitatively assess seasonal trends in harbor porpoise abundance and distribution within the Canadian waters of Juan de Fuca and Haro Straits (2001 - August). Stomach contents of post-mortem stranded porpoise were examined for prey species identification. The study area encompassed 805.3 km². A significant increase in both abundance and strandings occurred during the summer months. Additionally previously undocumented spatial distributions were recorded and localized areas of high counts may represent critical porpoise habitats. Anna will present a synthesis of the findings related to seasonal abundance, habitat use, prey and strandings.

Anna Hall has had a life long interest in the oceans and the creatures, which exist, in this mysterious world. She is currently in the Ph.D. program at the University of British Columbia, for which she will examine the relationship between the distribution of transient killer whales and their prey, specifically porpoises. Past academic pursuits include a B.Sc. honors degree completed in 1996 at the University of Victoria for which she explored habitat partitioning of harbor (*Phocoena phocoena*) and Dall's porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*) in the Canadian Gulf Islands. In January 2004, Anna completed a M.Sc. in zoology at the University of British Columbia. This research focused on the seasonal abundance, distribution and prey species of harbor porpoise in the waters of southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Additionally, in 2000, She co-authored a report with Graeme Ellis and Andrew Trites on the incidental mortality of small cetaceans in the BC selective salmon fishery. Ms Hall also volunteers her time to work towards conservation efforts. She serves as a member of the Board of Advisors to the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, as well as the Board of Directors of the West Coast Anti-Whaling Society, the Porpoise Research Society and the Whaleman Foundation. Anna is also a member of the Killer Whale Recovery Team for Fisheries and Oceans Canada as a representative of the commercial wild life viewing industry of southern British Columbia.

Interest in the Harbor Porpoise, small inconspicuous inhabitants of North Atlantic and North Pacific coastlines, was limited to a few scientific specialists until as recently as the late 1970s. By the 1990s, after a period of intense focus on the incidental mortality of dolphins and porpoises in gillnets, Harbor Porpoises had become high-profile subjects of concern, prompting international agreements, extensive (and costly) research efforts, and controversial changes in fishing regulations. In Europe, where they are called Common Porpoises, these animals were once the targets of large directed hunts. Fishermen in the Canadian Maritimes and New England call Harbor Porpoises “puffing pigs” or just “puffers”.

source: National Audubon Society's, *Guide to Marine Mammals of the World*, 1st edition, March 2002, p 460



Three forms of killer whales in Antarctic waters

text and illustrations by Uko Gorter

Mirroring the three different forms of killer whales that inhabit the Eastern North Pacific, descriptively known as transients, residents, and offshores, there is now evidence of similar populations in Antarctic waters. However, they are much more distinct morphologically.

Based on catches of opportunistic and targeted whaling by soviet fleets in the early 1960s and early 80s, two independent Russian groups of researchers already concluded the existence of different forms of killer whales in the Antarctic. While the first group of scientists (Mikhalev et al. 1981) did not present a holotype specimen of their proposed 'dwarf killer whale', *Orcinus nanus*, the second group (Berzin and Vladimirov, 1983), with more accurate descriptions of their proposed *Orcinus glacialis*, lost their specimens. As a result both reports were met with skepticism and received little attention.

Intrigued enough by these old reports as well as more recent evidence, Robert Pitman, a marine ecologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service, La Jolla, CA, spent three seasons in the Antarctic collecting biopsy samples and taking numerous photos. In his latest paper he, along with New Zealander Paul Ensor, describes three forms that occur in Antarctic waters.

These three forms, unimaginatively labeled type A, B, and C, do not only look different, they also show distinct food and habitat preferences. Type A is perhaps the typical *Orcinus orca* with black and white coloration. It hunts primarily for Antarctic Minke whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*. This type also shows a preference for open water, generally away from the ice-pack.

Type B, however is markedly different in outward appearance. It is lighter gray overall, with a discernible dorsal cape. The white areas are stained yellow by diatoms (algae) and the eyepatch is much larger and oval. It seems to prefer seals and as a result spends more time near the ice-pack. Similar spatial occurrence of this type with the described dwarf forms by Mikhalev, may suggest that this type is the same as *O. nanus*.

Lastly, type C also exhibits a lighter gray body, a dark dorsal cape, and yellowish patches. However, it has a smaller eyepatch which is slanted upwards. This type seems to feed primarily on Antarctic toothfish, *Dissostichus mawsoni*. It too lives near the ice pack.

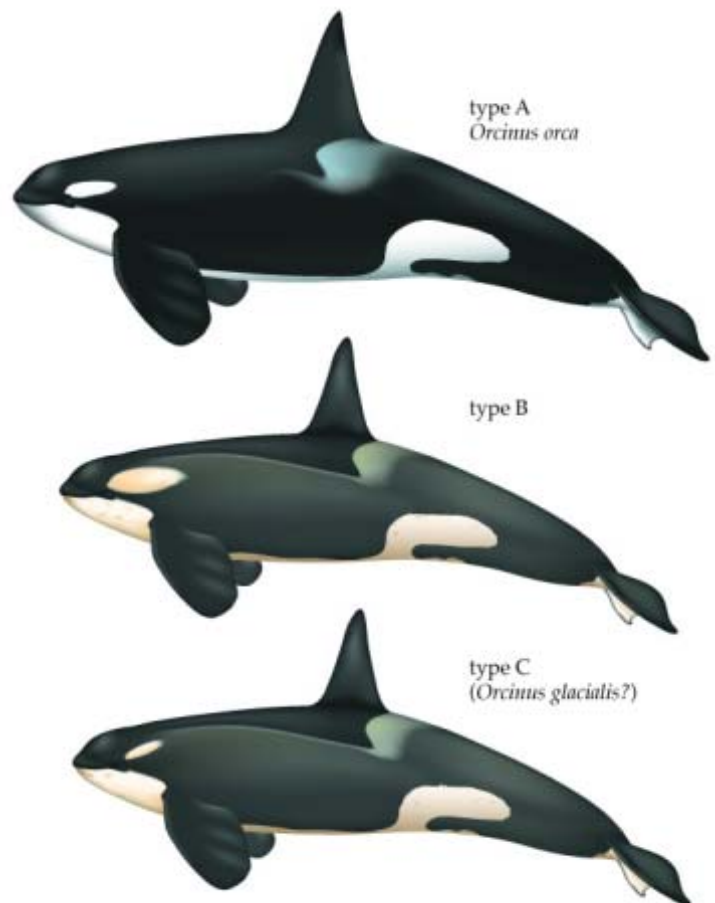
To what degree these forms may represent separate species would not only depend on the result of DNA samples, but also on examining specimens, the lack of which may have to put that answer on hold. But more than scientific curiosity, determining species status could give these populations better protection. Even though these orcas, unlike their urban cousins in Puget Sound, live in relative isolation, the need for protection may be just as valid. As New Zealand fishing industry is experimenting

with fishing for Antarctic toothfish, the impact for one population of Antarctic killer whales may prove to be disastrous. So a sense of urgency seems needed.

sources:

Pitman, R. L., and P. Ensor, Three forms of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in Antarctic waters, *Journal of Cetacean Resource Management*, 5(2): 131-139, 2003

Pitman, R.L., Good Whale Hunting, *Natural History*, 25-28, December 2003/January 2004



illustrations copyright © 2004 Uko Gorter, all rights reserved
editor's note: gray-scale doesn't really do the above illustrations justice, for example, in types B and C, the "white" areas are really yellowish



Cetacean Fun Facts

by Laurie Mollo-McLain

The Bowhead Whale

Geographic Range and Habitat

Bowheads occupy the glaciated polar regions of the Northern Hemisphere. They are commonly found near edges of pack-ice and ice floes in the arctic and sub-arctic waters. Seasonal migration patterns occur in summer and winter.

There are five stocks of bowhead whales. Three populations occur in the North Atlantic; 1) The Spitsbergen Stock (Greenland, Norway), 2) Davis Strait Stock, and 3) Hudson Bay Stock which are both north of Canada.

The two North Pacific stocks are 1) the severely depleted Okhotsk Stock off Russia and 2) The Bering Sea stock which is closest in proximity to the Pacific Northwest. It is the largest population of the bowhead stocks and is also referred to as the Arctic stock or Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort stock.

During migration, the Bering stock is reported to travel a distance of 3,600 miles with a pattern that occurs in all four directions. From winter grounds in the Bering Sea, migration occurs from April to June beginning north through the Chukchi Sea then east to the Beaufort Sea above Alaskan and Canadian border. Continued migration from August to November occurs along coastal northern Canada and Alaska. The three month journey commences westward with feeding in the Chukchi Sea, then finally south again along the Chukotsk Peninsula, Russia through the Bering Strait and back to the wintering grounds of the Bering Sea.

Physical Description

Bowheads are known to have the thickest layer of blubber estimated to be approximately 2 feet thick which provides insulation from the cold arctic waters.

Their predominately bluish-black bodies are incredibly robust with the head constituting 1/3 of the body size. They have been observed using their massive heads to break through thick layers of ice. A small ridge is seen on the anterior side (front) of the blowhole but the dorsal fin is absent. The pectoral fins are modest in size in comparison to their bodies.

Below the highly lunate mouth is a patch of white on the chin that displays a sequence of small black dots on the lower portion of the jaw. White patches are also seen on portions of the tail and ventrally (underside). Baleen plates are dark gray-black and are estimated to be 14 feet long, making them the longest known plates of any baleen whale!

Diet and Feeding

Bowheads are skim feeders - a method also seen in gray and right whales. They swim with open mouths as opposed to gulping methods used by other baleen whales. Feeding is done at all levels; top, mid-column and bottom.

Zooplankton consisting of tiny crustaceans such as euphausiids (krill), copepods and gammarid amphipods compose a significant portion of their prey but bowheads are also known to ingest many other types of invertebrates.

Communication

Bowheads are known to be very vocal and can be heard over a distance of many miles. Moans are most often produced but songs and calls have also been recorded, as well as loud sounds that are said to sound similar to gunshots. They have also been observed spyhopping, tail-slapping and breaching.

Social Behavior

These whales are known to congregate at feeding areas, but commonly travel alone or in small groups estimated to be no larger than six. There is no known bond association outside the mother/calf relationship.

Life Expectancy

Bowheads are one of the oldest animals on earth! Studies from a harpoon head found in the carcass of a bowhead indicate that some individuals live to be more than 200 years old. More accurate information comes from studies conducted using the acids from the eye lens which affirms that they live an average of 150 years.

Conservation Status

Because of their ample baleen and thick blubber, bowheads were a favorable and profitable species to hunt between the 17th and 19th centuries which caused severe depletion of certain stocks. They were granted protection from commercial whaling and were listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

As permitted by the IWC, subsistence harvests occur with approximately 49 whales hunted annually by Alaskan and Canadian indigenous peoples. This is a highly political matter.

The summer feeding habitat of the Bering Sea Stock is threatened by large-scale industrial development and fishery activities. Measures to protect the habitat have been sought.

For a list of references or for general inquiries, you may contact the author at Laurie@ProtectWhales.com

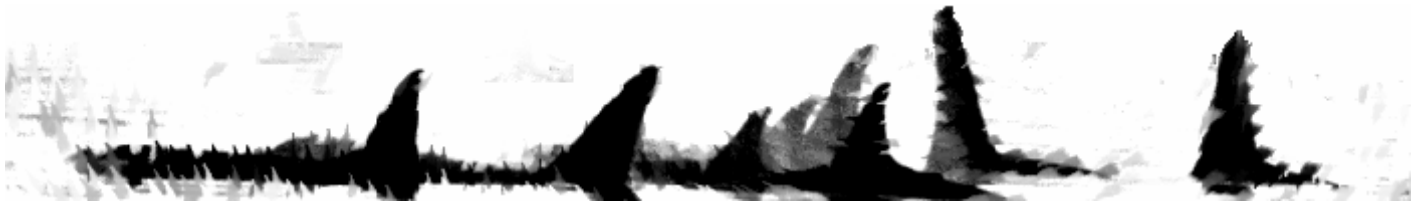
16 June Meeting Preview

Dr. Kristin Laidre

**Bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*)
foraging ecology in West Greenland**

Dr. Kristin Laidre is a research biologist currently working at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory in Seattle, Washington. Dr. Laidre obtained her B.S. degree from the University of Washington Zoology department in 1999 and a Ph.D. from the University of Washington School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences in 2003. Her research focuses on spatially explicit foraging ecology and quantitative habitat selection for marine mammals, primarily high Arctic cetaceans. Dr. Laidre is the Society for Marine Mammalogy's 2003 Stu Innes Memorial award winner.

This talk will present results of current field research on bowhead ecology, including satellite tagging studies, behavioral monitoring, and habitat and prey sampling.



Luna Update—OrcaLab press release—continued

(Continued from page 4)

or a captive whale. “That’s the biggest problem Luna faces,” said Spong. “Were it not for people wanting to engage Luna, I think he could carry on by himself without getting into trouble. At four years old he is maturing rapidly and is definitely capable of handling himself around boats. If people could learn to leave Luna alone and just ignore him, he’d probably be ok.”

OrcaLab’s research approach with Luna is the same as that of its Johnstone Strait project, observation without intrusion. An observation camp site was established on a high cliff and two hydrophone stations installed. The hydrophones have enabled day and night monitoring of Luna’s acoustics in the main areas he has been spending time. Over 60 hours of recordings have been made. “Luna has a fabulous voice that echoes through the deeps of Nootka Sound,” said Spong. “His calls clearly identify him as a southern resident orca and more precisely as a member of the L2 matriline. That means with virtual certainty that L67 is Luna’s mother, and because she is alive it gives great hope for the ultimate outcome of Luna’s journey, should he rejoin his orca kin.”

The winter whereabouts of much of the southern resident orca community are largely a mystery to scientists. The largest group, L pod, is often not sighted for months on end during the winter and spring. However, the summer “arrival” of L pod is fairly predictable. The group of more than 40 orcas usually arrives in the waters off southern Vancouver Island in late spring, and their “arrival” is usually from the north via west coastal waters off Vancouver Island. There is a good chance the pod will be off the entrance of Nootka Sound sometime during mid to late May. If that happens, there is a possibility that Luna could hear the other orcas or they could hear him, and that a “natural” reunion could take place. “Luna has been spending much of his recent time foraging in parts of Nootka Sound that have an acoustic connection to the outside ocean,” said Spong. “That means there is a chance that he and the other orcas could solve Luna’s problem by themselves. If that happens, everyone will be happy.”

Despite his positive view of Luna’s behavior and his hopes for a rosy outcome, Spong is worried by the imminent installation of 8 new fish farms in Nootka Sound. “The farms are going to be placed in the exact area Luna has been using lately,” said Spong. “This means there will be a whole new set of industrial activities in the area that is now most important to Luna, and it is the area that creates such good prospects for a natural reunion. Luna is accustomed to industrial activity, but this will be a new part of his scene and because it is new it will be a distraction to him. I simply cannot understand why these fish farms have to be installed at this critical time. They could ruin Luna’s chances of success.”

If you wish to help, please contact either The Whale Museum, Luna reunification fund, PO Box 945, Friday Harbor, WA-98250 or Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre, PO Box 3232 Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3X8 Canada, attention: "Help Rescue Luna"

Chapter Currents continued

(Continued from page 1)

to maintain and build on to our exciting Vashon Hydrophone Project, we simply need your support.

We will have a fantastic fundraising concert on **June 13**, at the Shoreline Unitarian Church. We hope to see you there and encourage you to bring your family and friends for an evening to remember. Please see page one of this newsletter for details.

Besides this shameless plea for more people to share the load and the laughs, and for money, we would love to receive in-kind donations. Please see the VHP article on page two for our current wish list.



photo of bowhead whale by Dr. Kristin Laidre, taken in Qeqertarsuaq, West Greenland in May 2002
“It’s about all you see from a small boat when working on bowheads, and a good example of the ‘bowed’ head!”

AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY



Puget Sound Chapter
P.O. Box 17136
Seattle, WA 98127-0836

www.acspugetsound.org
info@acspugetsound.org
(206) 781-4860

address label

address correction requested

SAVE THE DATES

Phinney Neighborhood Center, Room 6, 6532 Phinney Ave. N., Seattle, 7-9 pm, (just north of the Woodland Park Zoo)

— Wed. MAY 19th —

Anna Hall: Holidaying Harbor Porpoise where do they go, what do they eat, and why do they sometimes strand?

— Wed. JUNE 16th —

Dr. Kristin Laidre: Bowhead Whale Foraging Ecology in West Greenland.

YES! — ENROLL ME AS A MEMBER OF THE
PUGET SOUND CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY!

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| City: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 | Supporting |
| State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: (____) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> \$45 | Family |
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