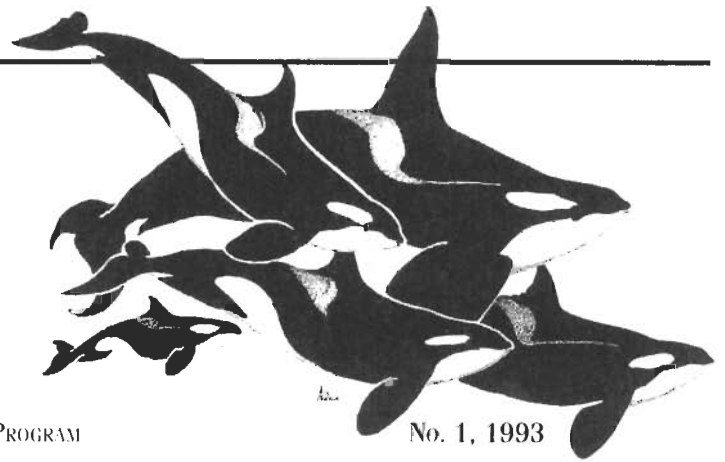


The Blackfish Sounder

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE VANCOUVER AQUARIUM'S KILLER WHALE ADOPTION PROGRAM

No. 1, 1993



An image transformed

Welcome to our premier issue!

This newsletter is published annually in the spring, to provide members of the Killer Whale Adoption Program with the latest information on killer whales in British Columbia and other parts of the world.

A big thank you goes to all members who joined early in the program, and patiently waited for this first issue. Much of the work in the Killer Whale Adoption Program is done by volunteers, and so we must depend on their availability to donate large amounts of time to the cause!

In this and future issues, you will find special feature articles on a wide range of topics related to killer whales and their environment. These articles are intended to address some of the more commonly asked questions about these fascinating animals, to report the latest research discoveries, and to pique the curiosity of dedicated orca aficionados.

*Killer whales are very special animals to us and to you. It is our hope that through **The Blackfish Sounder** you will share in the excitement of the discoveries you are helping to support. If there are topics you would like to read about in future issues, please let us know. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the next eight pages!*

Dr. John Ford
Marine Mammal Scientist
Vancouver Aquarium

Killer whale!

To most people, these two words evoke an image of power and beauty, of an animal familiar to us all, yet as enigmatic as the ocean world in which it lives. It's an irresistible image, one that makes even the most hardened among us gaze in awe at the sight of a tall, black dorsal fin slicing through the water nearby.

But it wasn't always this way. Until as little as 20 years ago, the words 'killer whale' had an entirely different effect. For centuries, western civilization viewed the killer whale as the embodiment of evil, and portrayed them in literature as rapacious hunters, eager to chew up boats and mariners at every opportunity.

"A killer whale cannot be properly depicted or described except as an enormous mass of flesh armed with savage teeth," wrote Roman scholar Pliny the Elder in the first century, A.D.

"In whatever quarter of the world [killer whales] are found, they seem always intent upon seeking something to destroy or devour," exclaimed whaler captain Charles Scammon in 1874.

The bad press continued well into the 20th century. "Lions, tigers and great bears are considered savage animals, but many times more powerful and far more vicious than any of these is the killer whale," wrote Joseph Cook and William Wisher in a 1963 book on the species.

Even as late as 1973, U.S. Navy manuals

described the killer whale as "extremely ferocious," warning that it "will attack human beings at every opportunity."

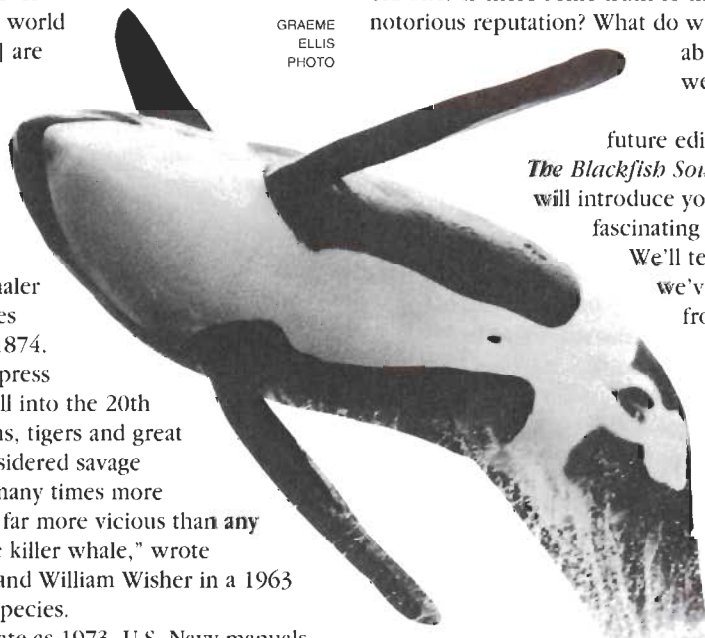
The whales didn't have many friends in Canada, either. In the 1960s, complaints that killer whales were affecting salmon catches put increasing pressure on fisheries officials to take action. Proposed measures included the use of machine guns, depth charges, fragmentation bombs, dynamite and mortars. The foundation for a machine gun was built overlooking Seymour Narrows, but a gun was never installed.

The tide finally began to turn in the late 1960s when killer whales began appearing as feature attractions at oceanariums. Drawn in part by the whales' fearsome reputation, the public began to soften its image of killer whales, and today they have to many become lovable "pandas of the sea."

But is this image just as misleading as the old one? Is there some truth to the whale's notorious reputation? What do we really know about the whale we call killer?

In this and future editions of *The Blackfish Sounder* we will introduce you to this fascinating animal.

We'll tell you what we've learned from 20 years of research and — through your continued support — what we hope to find out in the years to come.



GRAEME
ELLIS
PHOTO



JOHN FORD PHOTO

Introducing...

Orcinus orca, world citizen

Many of us in British Columbia tend to view killer whales as a West Coast phenomenon. Not only are they a frequent sight along our coastline, but even on land they are everywhere — on totem poles, wall murals, posters, jewelry, T-shirts, postcards and other assorted tourist paraphernalia.

Yet killer whales are, in fact, found in all the oceans of the world, from polar to tropical regions, although they seem to be most common in the colder waters of both hemispheres. The largest known concentrations are off Iceland, Norway, Antarctica, Japan and the Pacific coast from Washington State to Alaska.

Accurate numbers are not available for most areas, so the global population is not known. However, the species is not considered abundant.

Despite such a broad range, only one species of killer whale, *Orcinus orca*, is recognized, although there appear to be many localized races that differ slightly in appear-

ance, behavior and other biological traits. There are certain characteristics, however, that all killer whales share.

The killer whale is the largest member of the dolphin family, with adult males, or bulls, reaching a maximum length of up to 9.8 m (32 feet) and weight of 10 tons, compared to 8.5 m (28 feet) and 7.5 tons for mature females, or cows.

With their striking black and white coloration, fully grown killer whales are an impressive sight, particularly the adult males, whose tall, triangular dorsal fins can stand as high as 1.7 m (5.5 ft.), almost twice the height of the sickle-shaped dorsals of adult females.

Among the fastest swimmers in the ocean, killer whales can reach speeds of up to 30 kph, although their travelling pace is usually between 6 to 10 kph. Their vision is excellent both below and above water, but



The dorsal fins of adult males may reach 1.7 metres high. Here, mature bulls Booker (C3), foreground, and Weynton (C9) surface together.

like other toothed whales, they also use echolocation, or sound pulses, to navigate and locate food.

A highly social animal, killer whales communicate with one another through a variety of whistles, clicks and whines produced from their blowhole. Analysis of these sounds has revealed much about the complex social life of killer whales and has provided insight into the evolution of populations.

What's in a name?

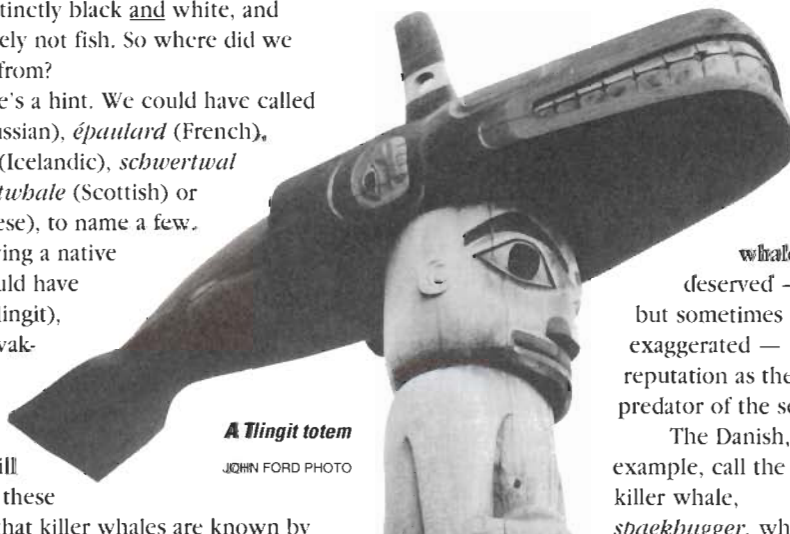
The name we've chosen for this newsletter is *The Blackfish Sounder*. But what, you may be wondering, does it mean? After all, killer whales are distinctly black and white, and they're definitely not fish. So where did we get our name from?

Well, here's a hint. We could have called it *kasatka* (Russian), *épaulard* (French), *bahyrningur* (Icelandic), *schwertwal* (German), *pictwbale* (Scottish) or *sbachi* (Japanese), to name a few.

Or following a native theme, we could have picked *kit* (Tlingit), *max'inux* (Kwakwaka'waka), or *artluq* (eastern Arctic Inuit).

As you will have guessed, these are all names that killer whales are known by

around the world. They are as varied as the cultures who use them, and most, in one form or another, pay homage to the killer



A Tlingit totem

JOHN FORD PHOTO

whale's deserved — but sometimes exaggerated — reputation as the top predator of the sea.

The Danish, for example, call the killer whale, *spækbugger*, which

literally translated means "fat chopper." They also use *hvalhund*, or "whale dog." Germans call it *mörderwal*, or "whale murderer," and on the Japanese island of Ainu, they speak of *repun kamui*, or "master of the open sea."

Closer to home, a prominent figure in Haida mythology is *Ska-na*, the "killer demon," while the Aleuts on Kodiak Island in Alaska traditionally referred to a killer whale as *polossatik*, "the feared one."

Even the widely used *orca* has sinister connotations. The whale's scientific name, *Orcinus orca*, uses the Latin word *orcinus*, which means "of or belonging to the kingdom of the dead."

Faced with all these choices we finally settled on *blackfish*, a colloquial West Coast expression for killer whales. Blackfish Sound is the name of a body of water just off Johnstone Strait, where killer whales are often seen in the summer months.



Resident or transient?

For years, researchers have known of two very distinct types of killer whale in the Pacific Northwest



Left, Loquillilla (I12) displays the typical rounded dorsal fin of a resident killer whale, compared to the more pointed fin of transient Langara (T10). Note the distinctive nicks in both fins, useful for identifying individuals.

Early in their study of killer whales in B.C. and Washington State waters, researchers were puzzled by certain individuals that seemed different from the rest. These whales looked, acted and sounded unlike most of the other whales they were encountering.

Based on their apparent ranges, the two 'types' of whales were designated "residents" and "transients".

Residents travel within predictable ranges in the summer months. The southern resident community, made up of 91 whales in three pods, extends from Puget Sound in Washington State to halfway up both coasts of southern Vancouver Island. The northern resident community, with about 200 whales in 16 pods, extends from the coasts of mid-Vancouver Island, north to the southeast tip of Alaska. Pods from one resident community rarely enter the range of the other.

Although residents can be seen within their ranges all year, they are most common during May to October. Where they go during the winter — they often vanish for months at a time — remains a mystery.

Transients, on the other hand, roam throughout the coastal waters of Washington State and B.C., north to the Queen Charlotte Islands and far into southeast Alaska. About 150 transient whales can be found in this range all months of the year.

Interestingly, although their ranges overlap, resident and transient whales have never been seen travelling together. In fact, even when they are as close as 100 metres apart, they appear to ignore each other.

Even more noticeable, though, are the physical and behavioral differences.

A transient's dorsal fin tends to be pointed, a resident's dorsal fin is usually more rounded. And a transient's saddle patch — the whitish area on the back just behind the dorsal fin — is generally more 'closed', or 'smooth-edged', whereas those of residents tend to be 'hooked' or 'notched'.

eat one kind of food, you eat another.' This way they can stay in the same area and not compete."

The different food preferences explain many of the behavioral anomalies. For example, when travelling, resident pods usually move from headland to headland as they forage, surfacing at fairly regular intervals. But transients probe every bay and cove, often charging through kelp beds and changing direction abruptly.

Particularly intriguing are the sound differences between the two. Residents are quite vocal when foraging and often use

echolocation to detect elusive fish. Transients appear to be largely silent when hunting, most likely to minimize detection. They may even modify how often and how loud they breathe to increase the element of surprise!

Even when not hunting, there is a distinct difference between

resident and transient 'voices'. Studies have shown that the distinctive call pattern, or dialect, of transient groups contains three to four specific communication calls, compared to the resident repertoire of five to 15. Amazingly, all transient killer whales along the entire Pacific Northwest coast share the same dialect, whereas residents can be grouped into four dialect 'clans'.

The often startling differences between residents and transients have led researchers to speculate that they represent two separate races of killer whale living in the same range, and that they have probably not interbred for hundreds of thousands of years. Preliminary genetic studies seem to support this theory.

But there are still many questions to be answered. How did such an unusual division evolve? Do the residents represent an inshore population of a larger offshore gene pool, and the transients another? And are there similar divisions within other killer whale populations around the world?

Researchers hope to find the answers to these and other questions in the years to come.

There are also very noticeable social differences. Unlike residents, who live in stable multi-generation "pods", transients travel in less stable "groups" that usually contain no more than one maternal line. Mother-offspring bonds are still strong, but transient society seems to be much more fluid than that of residents, with some maternal lines and individuals dispersing from their natal groups.

Resident pods usually number from five to 50 individuals. Transient groups tend to be smaller, most often containing two to four whales.

But perhaps the most dramatic difference between the two is in their dining habits. Residents eat predominantly fish, transients prefer marine mammals. As the late researcher Dr. Michael Bigg once put it, "It's as though the two had agreed on some sort of treaty: 'I'll



The Blackfish Sounder

More than 20 years of research has told us some amazing things about the social life of B.C.'s resident killer whales. Most remarkable is that they spend their whole lives travelling with their mother and kin. For these killer whales, life truly is...

Woosh! A plume of spray rises and hangs in the still morning air as the big bull killer whale exhales, inhales and then glides effortlessly back under the surface of the water. His tall dorsal fin sinks out of view, until the notch on the top is barely visible. Beside him, another tall fin emerges, periscope-like, out of the murky depths, while closer to shore, four smaller, curved fins break the surface in perfect unison.

Ahead, five more black fins appear out of a patch of mist. The two groups meet, and the morning air resonates with the sounds of playful splashing and excited whale conversation.

A family reunion is in progress.

If we had witnessed this scene 20 years ago, we would undoubtedly have dismissed it as a chance encounter of two groups of whales. But we now know better, because in those 20 years, we've made some remarkable discoveries about the social organization of killer whales.

Much of this research has been carried out in B.C.'s coastal waters, where two communities of relatively stable killer whale pods — known as residents — have made regular observation somewhat easier than in other parts of the world.

Thanks to this work we now know that

An I11-pod calf spy-hops as its adult relatives nap.



JOHN FORD PHOTO



JOHN FORD PHOTO

Part of A1-pod, backlit by the sun in Johnstone Strait.

killer whales are highly social animals and that most populations live in family groups that stay in close proximity to one other throughout their lives.

We've learned that killer whales are long-lived animals, and that they pass through 'childhood', puberty, adulthood and death at almost exactly the same ages as we do.

We also know that female killer whales seem to live significantly longer than males. Females have an average life expectancy of more than 50 years, but may live as long as 70 to 80 years, whereas a male's average lifespan is slightly more than 29 years, with a maximum longevity of only 50 to 60 years of age.

But perhaps the single most significant discovery was that killer whale social structure is centred around the females.

The most intimate unit of resident killer whale society is the maternal group — a female and her offspring. They are virtually inseparable, staying within a few kilometres of each other all their lives.

Female killer whales typically give birth to their first calf at about 15 years of age. Given a gestation period lasting 17 months, and nursing obligations for about a year, a

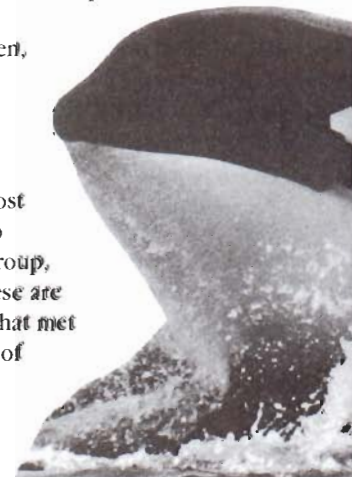
female produces an average of about five viable calves during her 25-year reproductive lifespan.

Calves remain exceptionally close to their mother for their first two to three years of life. Even after the female has had more calves, all killer whales continue to spend major portions of their lives travelling with their mother.

Once daughters mature and have offspring of their own, a new maternal group is formed. One or more maternal groups make up the next unit of killer whale social structure — the subpod. Subpod members travel together most of the time and are usually closely related.

For example, the first six whales mentioned at the beginning of this story make up a family group researchers have designated as the A5 subpod. The matriarch at the core of this group is a female called *Licka* (A8). She has two adult daughters, one of which, *Sonora* (A42), gave birth in 1991 to her first calf, *Kelkpa* (A57). *Licka* and her other daughter make up one maternal group. *Sonora* and her calf form a new maternal group. If the remaining daughter, *Havannah* (A28) has a calf, then a third maternal group will emerge within A5 subpod.

The next unit of social organization is a pod, which is made up of one or more subpods that often, but not always, travel together. In our example, A5 subpod is thought to be most closely related to another family group, A14 subpod. These are the two groups that met at the beginning of this story. Together, these 11 cousins, aunts, uncles,





A family affair

nieces and nephews make up a pod known as A5 pod. There are 16 pods with about 200 whales in B.C.'s northern resident community of killer whales.

But if killer whale life revolves around breeding-age females and their daughters, what about the sons? Where do they fit in?

When they began their field work, researchers presumed that the adult males seen travelling in close proximity to certain females were 'harem masters'. Only after they had begun piecing together the family trees did the researchers come to the astonishing realization that these fully grown males were, in fact, travelling with their mothers.

In the A5 subpod, *Licka* had an older relative, probably her sister, nicknamed *Scar* (A9), who died in 1990. She left behind two adult sons, *Top Notch* (A5) and *Foster* (A26). The two males, who were always seen with their mother, now sometimes travel alone together, or with their probable aunt, *Licka*, and her offspring. Researchers will watch *Top Notch* and *Foster* closely in the next few years to see how they fare.

The fact that all resident killer whales — both sons and daughters — stay with



GRAEME ELLIS PHOTO

Calves stick close to mom for their first 2-3 years.

their natal group throughout life appears to be unique among mammalian social systems. In all other species, it is standard practice for one or both sexes to disperse at maturity — a natural and necessary safeguard against inbreeding.

So why are killer whales different, and how is inbreeding avoided?

Because 95 per cent of killer whale life goes on underwater, we know very little about reproduction in the wild, other than the sudden appearance of a new calf. Furthermore, researchers have yet to identify the father of any specific calf.

But this much we do know: males become sexually mature at about 15 years, females at 12-13 years. Breeding can occur throughout the year, but in the Pacific Northwest it is most frequent in late summer and fall.

Field studies indicate that sexual behavior — signalled by a visible penis during surface activity — often occurs when different groups of whales meet. These gregarious gatherings may involve several different pods, forming what researchers call a "superpod".

Adult males have also been seen temporarily straying from their group and swimming behind females of another group. If this is courtship behavior, as suspected, it assures that males are mating with females that are either unrelated or distantly related, thus avoiding or minimizing inbreeding.

However, one study has shown genetic similarity within populations of killer whales "sufficient to suggest inbreeding." This is an area that will undoubtedly get more research attention in the coming years.

Another unsolved mystery is the high death rate for killer whale calves. Studies have shown that up to 45 per cent of calves die in their first year of life. Despite this, the overall resident population appears to be increasing at a rate of about three per cent a year.

Through continued long-term studies researchers will undoubtedly learn more about the complex and rich social life of this intriguing animal.

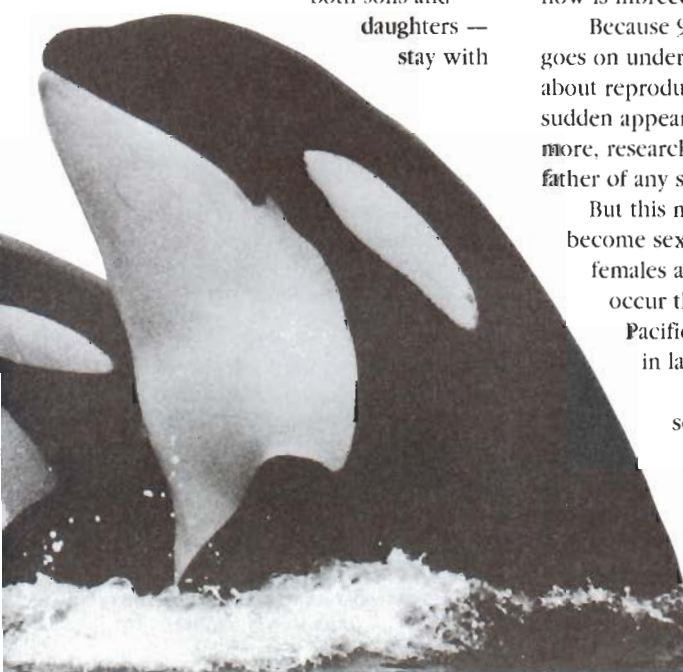
LANCE BARRETT-LENNARD PHOTO



Kelp is a frequent 'toy' for playful killer whales.

CENTRE PAGE: Killer whales often 'spy-hop', either to orient themselves, or out of curiosity.

GRAEME ELLIS PHOTO



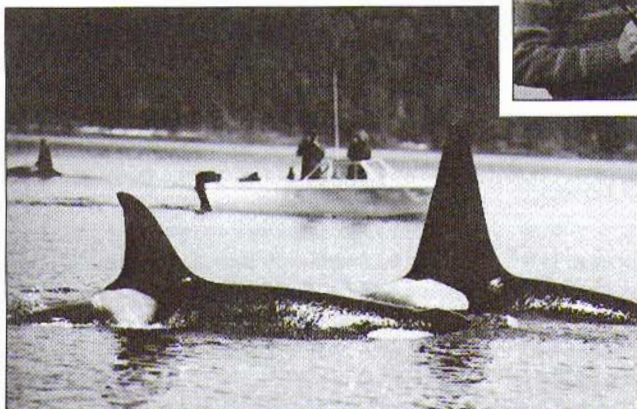


Why study them? It's a matter of survival

The reason we continue to study killer whales goes far beyond idle curiosity about a species we have come to admire. Their very survival may depend upon us.

Pollution, growing competition for salmon, the driftnet fishery, boat traffic, loss

Below, researchers observe Top Notch (A5), at right, and his mother Scar (A9), now dead, as another member of the A5 subpod surfaces nearby. Inset, the late Dr. Michael Bigg, whose pioneer work in killer whale photo-identification techniques laid the foundations for ongoing field research.



JOHN FORD PHOTO

of habitat, and even escalating numbers of whalewatchers — all may threaten the welfare of the Pacific Northwest's killer whales.

"Ironically, the more we learn about killer whales the more we realize how vulnerable they really are," says Dr. John Ford, the

GRAEME ELLIS PHOTO



Vancouver Aquarium's marine mammal scientist. "As a society we are encroaching more and more into their habitat. We can protect areas, but that won't mean much for their long-term survival if we continue to compete

with them for food, and pollute their environment with toxins and noise."

Killer whales are at the top of the marine food chain, and are known as an "indicator" species. Any major changes within the food chain will affect them — in ways

that are often hard to detect.

"Even though we are not shooting killer whales anymore, we are putting pressure on them in more insidious ways. For example, there is evidence that industrial toxins are working their way up the food chain, increasing in concentration as they go. What effect they're having on the killer whales, we don't yet know. But in other species, such as dolphins, high levels of PCB's have been found in animals that have mass-stranded."

Competition for food is also a growing concern, he says. "When 250,000 sockeye salmon went missing for whatever reason in the Fraser River run last summer, did anyone think about how this may affect the whales?"

In order to protect killer whales, researchers need to know as much as possible about them; how many there are, where they go, and what they need to survive and thrive.

"For a long-lived animal such as the killer whale, we need long-term studies to get this information," says Ford. "Every year we learn more and more, and just when we're confident we understand them...they surprise us and a whole series of new questions have to be answered."

Accidental tourists?

There were some surprise visitors to the waters off Victoria late last summer.

On September 6, a large group of killer whales was spotted several miles southeast of Victoria, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This in itself was not unusual, since the three resident pods of B.C.'s southern killer whale community — numbering 91 animals — are regularly seen in the area.

But these whales were different. When Seacoast Expeditions, a local whalewatching company, arrived on the scene, on-board naturalist Eric Walters quickly realized that the whales did not match the IDs of any residents or transients known to frequent the area.

The word spread, and researchers from the Marine Mammal Research Group in Victoria and the Center for Whale Research on San Juan Island soon arrived with cameras and hydrophones. Attempts to record vocalizations were unsuccessful, but in the eight hours the whales were followed, 25 rolls of film were shot for ID purposes.

In total, 65 individual whales were identified, all of them new to the Victoria area. Two whales were matched to file photos from the Queen Charlotte Islands off northwestern B.C. All are believed to be members of an "offshore" community of killer whales, first distinguished from residents and transients in 1991 (see story next page).

WHALE HOTLINE

Report marine mammal sightings and strandings to:

380-1925 in the Victoria area,
or 1-800-665-5939 toll-free anywhere in B.C.

On the water (in the Victoria area):
VHF channel 68 to the vessel *Sundiver*

All sightings, no matter how old, are useful for research purposes and are entered into a computer database. Records are available to all researchers. When current local sightings of killer whales or any unusual species are reported, researchers will try to respond to them. Please report date, time, location, description of the animals, number, direction of travel, and behavior, as well as your name, phone number(s) and address in case further information is required.



JOHN FORD PHOTO

Queen Charlotte surprises

Killer whale researchers are making new — and old — acquaintances off British Columbia's northern coast.

A landmark 1991 field study by John Ford, marine mammal scientist at the Vancouver Aquarium, Graeme Ellis, a biologist at the Pacific Biological Station, and Linda Nichol, a research associate with the Vancouver Aquarium, identified 54 killer whales off the Queen Charlotte Islands that did not match ID photos of any transients or residents known in the Pacific Northwest.

The whales, provisionally named "offshore-types," were encountered seven times during the study, usually in large groups numbering up to 25 individuals. The excited researchers snapped hundreds of photographs of the "new" whales, and dropped hydrophones into the water to listen in to their conversations.

"The calls they make are amazing," says Ford, an expert on killer whale dialects. "They're very chatty like residents, but their

sounds are unlike any resident or transient I've heard. This indicates they're unrelated to the pods we know."

As of spring 1993, about 150 "offshore" whales have been identified in the Queen Charlottes and elsewhere. Researchers are keen to learn more about these whales; how many there are, where they travel, what they eat, and if they interact with other killer whales.

"We think that these new whales are perhaps a distinct community that generally roams far offshore, but occasionally approaches the nearshore areas of the Queen Charlottes," says Ford. "It's an intriguing new twist to our studies."

The 1991 study — which was the first organized survey of killer whales in the Queen Charlottes — also revealed that transient killer whales known from other areas of the Pacific Northwest are frequent visitors to those waters. But what about B.C.'s



This 'offshore' female, designated O3 by researchers, was photographed off the Queen Charlottes.

resident pods? Do they go that far offshore? The answer came last summer when photos from two sightings identified members of the 11s, A5s, B1s, C1s, and I31s.

"If all pod members were present, this represents 60 whales, or 30 per cent of the northern resident community," says Ford. "This is the first time northern residents have been seen there, and it will be interesting to see if they're back again in the coming years, or whether 1992 was an unusual year."

The Queen Charlotte studies are made possible by the Canadian Parks Service and Langara Fishing Lodge.

The sounds of science

How well can killer whales hear?

That's what researchers at the Vancouver Aquarium hope to find out, with the help of the facility's killer whales, Finna and Bjossa.

Over the last several months the two whales have been participating in 'hearing tests.' A hydrophone is placed in the pool and random two-second tones are emitted at various frequencies. The whales are trained to stay for a minimum of 15 seconds at a T-bar; if they hear a tone, they go to another trainer for a fish reward.

Killer whales do have ears, although they are so small externally they are hard to spot. Sounds are received through the hollow lower jawbone, where they are carried to the inner ear. Killer whales are believed to hear in the 100 kilohertz range, compared to the human range of between 16 and 20 kilohertz.

Such sensitivity may come with a price. There is concern that underwater noise

caused by boat traffic may interfere with the whales' use of sound to communicate, navigate and find food.

Tests by Dr. David Bain at Marine World Africa USA, have already shown that killer whales do have a harder time perceiving tones in a noisy background. The Vancouver study continues that work.

"After we've determined Finna and Bjossa's hearing sensitivity," says Ford, "the next step is to try and get them to resolve tones in a noisy background. That will tell us to what extent noise pollution affects their use of sonar."

The testing does not harm the whales, he adds, because the goal is to find out how low — not how high — a volume they can detect.

"This is the sort of research we couldn't possibly do in the wild, and in the long run will help answer questions that are vital to the conservation of the entire species."

STUART DAVIS/VANCOUVER SUN PHOTO



Finna listens to the hydrophone, as John Ford looks on.



Population Update

An annual summary of births, deaths and other notable events in the lives of whales on our 'adoption' list

We are pleased to announce that a few whales have been "busy" since we first published our genealogical chart for the Killer Whale Adoption Program. The following females were seen with new calves in 1992:

- in the A11 subpod, *Skagit* (A35) has a new calf, *Racey* (A59);
- in the A24 subpod, *Kelsey's* (A24) new baby is *Surf* (A58);
- in the A5 subpod, *Stripe* (A23) is a new mom to *Fife* (A60);
- in T12 group, *Pachena* (T12) has a new calf, *Vargas* (T12C).

Plus there were two newcomers from 1991 inadvertently left off the genealogy. In the C4 subpod, *Lama's* (C8) new calf is

Virago (C19), while *Ivory's* (C6) newest youngster is *Squally* (C18).

For those of you interested in adopting new youngsters, we ask that you wait until 1994. Studies have shown that up to 45 per cent of calves die in their first year, so to be cautious, we think it best that a new calf not be "up for adoption" until it has been sighted two years in a row.

Researchers are as equally cautious about reporting mortalities. A death is assumed when a whale is not seen with its natal group after two or three "solid" encounters with that group. (This applies more to residents; the less cohesive transients are more difficult to monitor.) If the whale has still not been seen

by the end of the next field research season, then it is a confirmed death. Fortunately, among our "adoptee" whales, we have no confirmed deaths reported for 1992.

A transient, "porpoising" off Victoria, B.C.



ROBIN BAIRD PHOTO

Study outlines Johnstone Strait concerns

Let them be.

That is the overall message contained in the Johnstone Strait Killer Whale Committee's final report, released in 1992 after a two-year study of how human activities are affecting killer whales in the Robson Bight (Michael Bigg) Ecological Reserve and other areas of Johnstone Strait.

The committee was created by the B.C. and federal governments in response to

growing concerns that human activity, such as boat traffic, logging, and commercial fishing, potentially threaten the whales' continued use of Johnstone Strait waters. The region is widely known as one of the best areas in the world to watch and study wild killer whales.

The committee's final recommendations, made after lengthy public review, deal with a wide range of management issues and the three major avenues for dealing with them —

education, legislation and enforcement, and research.

The first meeting of the Johnstone Strait Killer Whale Management Committee, charged with implementing the recommendations, took place this March. The committee is made up of representatives of various groups, including researchers, tour operators, fishing associations, the logging industry, native peoples, and government.

Acknowledgements

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