

Alaska Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network



Spring/Summer 2018 Newsletter

REDUCE, REUSE AND RECYCLE! See Page 10

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Greetings from the Coordinator

by Mandy Migura, NMFS

Greetings Alaska Stranding Network Members and Partners! Welcome to another issue of our stranding newsletter. We have a lot going on in this issue, so I hope you can read through it all. As discussed during our February stranding network meeting and oil spill drill, we've added a page at the end of the newsletter for a Message Board, so be sure to check that out and contribute ideas in the future.

Speaking of the network meeting and oil spill drill, thanks to all those who attended, presented information, and participated in the drill. We received really positive comments and it sounded like everyone learned something. It was a good opportunity for me to meet many of our network members and partners I hadn't yet met. Here are a couple photos I took during the meeting. Thinking ahead, we don't anticipate planning such a large meeting in 2019, but might try to have a short meeting again in conjunction with the AMSS. If you are interested in helping plan a future meeting, let us know!



In the first four months of 2018 we received reports of 31 strandings across the state, as compared to 24 over the same time period in 2017. We are starting our busy stranding "season", so stay vigilant and let's all keep our fingers crossed that it's a fairly quiet year. Remember that Level A reports (including human interaction forms) are due within 30 days. Right now, we are paying particular attention to a couple species, specifically sightings of ringed seals in the Aleutians and sightings of compromised or thin gray whales anywhere in the state. Please share any reports with us asap.

The entire Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program is under going a new NEPA review. Public comments are currently being accepted to obtain your thoughts on what is or is not working and recommended changes. See page 17 for more info.

Check your stranding agreement – is it expiring this year? Many are. Let us know if you are interested in renewing your agreement. New stranding agreements will now have their own unique Stranding Agreement number, so you will be able to cite that number.

For those of you who submitted a proposal for the 2018 Prescott Grant Program, due to delays in obtaining a federal budget this year, Prescott Grant notifications may be delayed. All notifications should be made by Labor Day (but hopefully earlier).



What Are...?



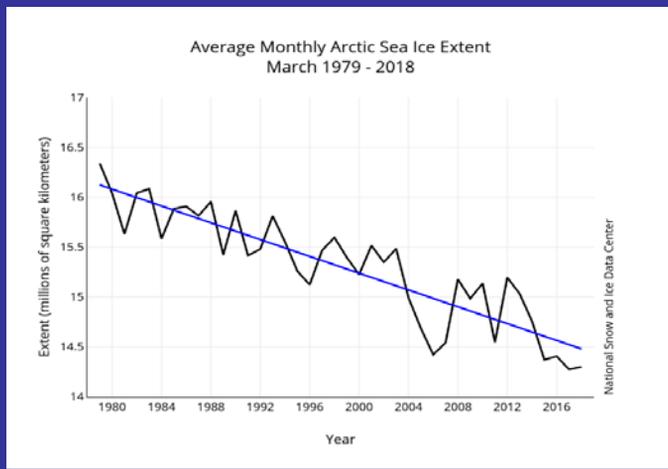
: This is a symbol to help easily recognize the end of a story or section.

Photo opp... : These are miscellaneous and interesting stranding photos received this year, but which do not necessarily accompany a specific story or topic in this newsletter. 2

Ringed Seals in the Southern Bering Sea

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

According to NOAA's 2017 Arctic Report Card, the environment in the Arctic may have reached a "new normal", characterized by "long-term losses in the extent and thickness of the sea ice cover, the extent and duration of the winter snow cover and the mass of ice in the Greenland Ice Sheet and Arctic glaciers, and warming sea surface and permafrost temperatures".



There are no indications that historic conditions in the region will return. In 2018, the volume of Bering Sea ice loss was almost unprecedented, the second lowest in the 1979 -2018 satellite record after a record low in 2017. The character of sea ice cover is also becoming younger and thinner. In 2017, only 21% of the sea ice cover was composed of thicker, older ice as compared to 45% in 1985 (Richter-Menge et al. 2017).

As the sea ice changes, so do the behavior and energetics of the creatures that depend upon the ice for survival. One of the most well known examples occurred in 2007 when, in response to a sharp decrease in ice extent, walrus moved to terrestrial resting areas in lieu of ice, and thousands of mortalities were reported due to trampling as adults stampeded with disturbances (Jay and Fischbach 2008). Many other impacts are less widely recognized. In the northern Bering Sea community of Diomede, the ice returns from the north ~late October/early November, pushing species not ice-associated south if they have not already left in advance of it. Gray whales, for example, wouldn't be seen again until the ice allows, perhaps in late May/June.

In 2017, however, the sea ice formed so late that Diomede had a subadult gray whale wash ashore on December 12th. This gray whale had been killed by orcas (both the tongue and a jaw removed) recently enough that not only the skin/blubber but the meat were salvaged for human consumption (Diomede IGAP office).



Right: Diomede community members flense the carcass of a fresh gray whale stranded in December of 2017. Photo courtesy Diomede IGAP office.

Ringed Seals - continued

A marked increase in the presence of young ringed seals in unusual locations around the southern Bering Sea may be yet another indication of biological shifts due to decreasing ice.



Above: The first ringed seal reported from Dutch Harbor in December, 2017. Photo courtesy Andy Dietrick.

Ringed seals are sufficiently uncommon in the southern Bering Sea to be identified as an extralimital species and deserving of a report to NMFS. The first such report was received from Dutch Harbor in December of 2017. Since then NMFS has received over 44 reports of ringed seals, all probable yearlings, from communities located along the southern Bering Sea. Of those reports, NMFS has been able to confirm 28 individual animals from Nelson Lagoon, Akutan, the Pribilof Islands, and Dutch Harbor.

On March 27, NMFS sent a flyer out to Bering Sea communities through the Stranding Network and the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA) in order to determine the magnitude and scope of sightings. With only single unconfirmed reports coming in from Atka and Adak, it became apparent that Dutch Harbor was the hot spot. As of May 7, 18 of the 28 confirmed individuals were from Dutch Harbor. Melissa Good, Stranding Network member from Dutch Harbor, has been doing an excellent job both assessing and tracking the animals, communicating her findings and shipping animals when required.

The animals have been in variable health and body condition. Many, if not most of the seals appeared thin (which may not be unexpected for this time of year). The extent of alopecia (i.e., hair loss) has ranged from no evidence of hair loss in some seals, to patchy or extensive in others. A number of the animals had festering lesions or wounds, mostly on the flippers or around the face. Behaviors ranged from alert and skittish to lethargic and moribund (i.e., in terminal decline).



Above: A Dutch Harbor ringed seal with no apparent alopecia or lesions. Photo courtesy Greg Peters.

Ringed Seals - continued



Above left: A young ringed seal first seen in January on the Pribilof Island of Saint George. *Above right:* The same animal in April with a facial wound and notable alopecia. Photos courtesy Dennis Lekanof.

Of the five animals that were considered moribund, two died as arrangements were being made to transport to the Alaska SeaLife Center (ASLC), one died soon after arrival at the ASLC, and two are still alive and improving. Preliminary findings indicate that bacteria and/or parasites were involved in the poor health and mortality. However, whether these organisms are primary pathogens or secondary, opportunistic pathogens is uncertain.



While some of the symptoms noted in these animals are the same as those seen in the recently closed 2011 Arctic Pinniped UME, the latter included multiple species and age classes. The primary cause for the 2011 UME was not determined.

Left: A thin ringed seal with significant alopecia and dermatitis observed on St. Paul the first week of May. Photo courtesy Pamela Lestenkof.

Peter Boveng, leader of the Polar Ecosystem Program for the Marine Mammal Lab, speculates that the increased presence of these young ringed seals in southern Bering Sea locations is a reflection of the extreme low ice. The reduced availability of sea ice could be why ringed seals are showing up recently in the southern Bering, possibly in search of alternate foraging and resting habitats. The question remains whether these animals are outliers or, with continued changes in the Bering Sea ice, are they indicators that all regional ringed seals may be in trouble?

Jay, C.V. and A.S. Fischbach. 2008. Pacific Walrus Response to Arctic Sea Ice Losses. USGS Fact Sheet 2008-3041.

Richter-Menge, J., J.E. Overland, J.T. Mathis, and E. Osborne, Eds., 2017: Arctic Report Card 2017, <http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/Report-Card>.

Copper River Delta Update

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

A huge round of applause goes to NMFS Office of Enforcement (OLE) for a successful investigation into the 2015 deaths of Steller sea lions in the Copper River Delta.

In the early summer of 2015, NMFS PRD in Juneau received word of at least 5 dead Steller sea lions on the barrier islands of the Copper River Delta. A subsequent survey in response to the report recorded at least 18 pinniped carcasses, most of which were sea lions and many of which had been shot.



Above: NMFS OLE officers examine a Steller sea lion carcass. Photo courtesy NMFS.

The shootings prompted an investigation by OLE officers as well as annual PRD carcass surveys of the area in 2016 and 2017. Further information on the carcass surveys may be found in the Copper River Delta Marine Mammal Carcass Survey Reports as well as the 2015, 2016, and 2017 Summer/Fall Stranding Newsletters at:

<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings>.

As a result of the OLE investigation, on April 19, 2018, U.S. Attorney for the District of Alaska Bryan Schroder announced that two men have been charged with harassing and killing Steller sea lions with shot guns and then making false statements and obstructing the government's investigation into their criminal activity. The press release for this investigation may be found at: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ak/pr/two-alaska-men-charged-harassing-killing-steller-sea-lions-and-obstructing-investigation>.

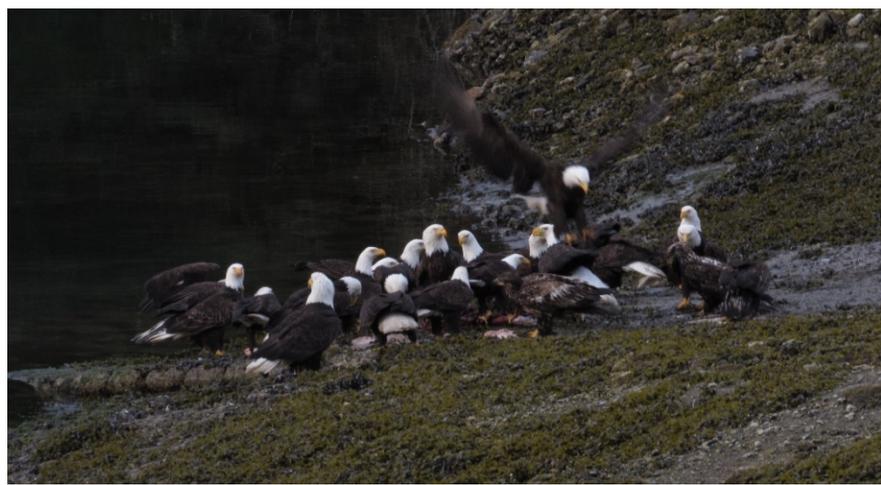


Photo opp...

Left: A convocation of eagles around a seal carcass in Juneau.

Photo courtesy Drew Collins.

Risso's Dolphins Sighting

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

The Fall/Winter 2017 newsletter included an article highlighting species rarely observed in Alaskan waters. One such species was Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), with a single male described in the literature as stranded on Middleton Island in the central Gulf of Alaska in 1977.

Photos courtesy Stephanie Jurries.



On March 7 of this year, Stephanie Jurries and Brad Baxter had the unexpected and rare pleasure of viewing a pod of 100 – 200+ Risso's dolphins near Tlevak Strait, Prince of Wales Island, in southern Southeast Alaska. Stephanie's blog of the sighting may be accessed here:

<https://www.emeraldislandadventures.com/single-post/2018/03/08/A-Whale-of-a-Day>



Photo opp...

The first humpback whale report of 2018 was of a fresh carcass trailing blood observed in Controller Bay during an ADF&G aerial survey on April 17. A US Coast Guard C130 was subsequently dispatched to look for the carcass, but was not able to locate it.

Photo courtesy Jeremy Botz, ADF&G.

Alaska SeaLife Center – 2017 Stranding and Rehabilitation

by Kathie Woodie, ASLC

Alaska SeaLife Center's Wildlife Response Team Provides Expert Care for Stranded Cook Inlet Beluga Calf

The Alaska SeaLife Center has concluded 159 days of round-the-clock care for the Cook Inlet beluga calf, Tyonek. On Thursday, March 8, Tyonek was successfully transported to SeaWorld San Antonio in Texas.

On September 30, 2017, the one-month-old calf was found stranded near Trading Bay in western Cook Inlet. With the authorization and assistance of NOAA, Tyonek was transported to the ASLC and housed in the Center's I.Sea.U. When he first arrived he was in a weakened condition and required 24/7 care from multiple animal care experts. During Tyonek's first days at the Center, he was 140 pounds and 162 cm long. He gradually progressed from suckling from a tube to drinking from a bottle. As Dr. Carrie Goertz, Director of Animal Health, described, "When it comes to helping a terribly rare Cook Inlet beluga, every day is a victory."

In November, Tyonek was transitioned to a larger outdoor pool as he became more independent. Over the next few months Tyonek steadily gained weight and grew stronger, becoming more playful with his caregivers. At his final weigh-in he was 260 pounds and 177 cm long

Once NOAA Fisheries determined Tyonek was non-releasable and could not survive in the wild, the agency followed its formal procedure to place him at a permanent care facility in the United States. Based on a thorough review of the applications, NOAA Fisheries selected SeaWorld San Antonio as the location best suited for Tyonek to thrive because they have both adult females and young male calves that will be important for Tyonek's social development.

Tyonek is the first Cook Inlet beluga calf to be successfully rehabilitated. "We are ecstatic that Tyonek continues to grow and gain strength when just over five months ago he was found stranded, malnourished, and dehydrated on a beach," said Alaska SeaLife Center President and CEO, Dr. Tara Riemer. "The ASLC is thankful for the support of Georgia Aquarium, Mystic Aquarium, Shedd Aquarium and SeaWorld, who assisted the ASLC team since October. It has been a long journey for Tyonek, and we were happy to be a part of this young calf's story."



ACTIVITIES PICTURED ARE AUTHORIZED BY MMHSRP MMPA/ESA #18786-01

Above: Alaska SeaLife Center team members treating the stranded Cook Inlet beluga calf on October 1, 2017.

Alaska SeaLife Center – continued

Here are some statistics from Tyonek's time at the Center:

- Over the course of 159 days, employees and volunteers of ASLC and partner aquariums worked over 7000 hours to care for Tyonek.
- While at the Center, this young calf nearly doubled his weight from 140 to 260 pounds.
- Tyonek drank 195 gallons of formula, an average of 1.2 gallons per day.



The Alaska SeaLife Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, is the only permitted marine mammal wildlife response and rehabilitation entity in Alaska. Over 80% of the funding for the Center's wildlife response program comes from charitable donations. The wildlife response team responds to calls across the 33,904 miles of coastline throughout Alaska. The Center is prepared for wildlife response year-round. Last year was especially eventful with response to several sea otters, various species of seal, and a walrus as well as this Cook Inlet beluga calf. We are thankful for our donors, members, and supporters who help make what we do possible.

Left:: Tyonek playing in the outdoor pool at the ASLC on February 28, 2018.



Photo opp...

Each year, many marine mammals and birds move along the coast of Alaska in search of ephemeral prey, including eulachon or candlefish (*Thaleichthys pacificus*), and Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*).

Left: Steller sea lions hauled out near the Alsek River during a eulachon run. Photo courtesy Lauri Jemison, ADF&G.

The PEG Board (Pinniped Entanglement Group)

By Kim Raum-Suryan, NMFS

Summary of Sixth International Marine Debris Conference

The [Sixth International Marine Debris Conference](#) (6IMDC) convened in San Diego from March 12-16, 2018. The conference was sold out, with 700+ attendees from 54 countries and another 250 on the waiting list. The previous 5IMDC was held 7 years ago in Honolulu. There were 74 technical sessions with six concurrent sessions each day.



There were many subjects of interest including: outreach and education, effective marine debris messaging, the effects of microplastics and microfibers on fish and invertebrates, how to change littering and recycling behaviors, citizen science, impacts of marine debris on megafauna, policy, derelict fishing gear and ghost gear, strategies for preventing trash before it starts, marine debris removal projects, achieving regular and systematic removal of newly lost fishing gear through collaborative fisheries management, and much more.

Above and below: Juneau PRD staff collecting trash off the Portland Island shoreline during a 2017 beach clean-up.



There were several Pinniped Entanglement Group (PEG) members in attendance as presenters or organizers. We (Elizabeth Hogan from World Animal Protection and I) chaired a session entitled “Lose the Loop: Global collaboration to reduce and prevent pinniped entanglement in marine debris”. The session started off with several excellent presentations. This was followed by a panel discussion entitled “Pinniped Marine Debris Entanglement Response: Best practices and Lessons learned.”

REDUCE

The PEG Board – continued

In addition to our session, we also presented a poster entitled “A global community dedicated to bringing a permanent end to pinniped entanglements: The Pinniped Entanglement Group (PEG)” and we participated in a PEG Networking lunch to answer questions about our PEG group and entanglement response.



Overall, the conference was a mix of being very depressing given the sheer amount of plastic pollution and derelict fishing gear in the ocean coupled with a lot of hope from the many grassroots organizations and more formal organizations that are trying to “turn off the tap”, “turn the tide”, and work toward solutions.

Left: PEG members from the U.S., Australia, Mexico, and Germany gather during the Marine Debris Conference.

Of major concern, we learned that if we keep producing (and failing to properly dispose of) plastics at predicted rates, plastics in the ocean will outweigh fish pound for pound by 2050. There is widespread contamination of microfibers of polypropylene, nylon, and polyethylene terephthalate in globally sampled bottled drinking water and 87% of water samples collected as surface water had plastic contamination.

With much hope, we learned of the many grassroots organizations that have begun all over the world. Some started with one person, others with a small group, and many of them have now gone global. If you would like to be inspired, I would suggest you visit <http://www.byebyeplasticbags.org/> and watch the TED talks by Melita and Isabel Wijzen (Melita was at the conference and was amazing) who started Bye Bye Plastic bags when they were 12 and 10. Another very inspirational presentation was by Afroz Shah. In October 2015, Afroz, a lawyer from Mumbai, and his 84-year-old neighbor Harbansh Mathur were frustrated with the piles of decomposing waste that had washed up and overwhelmed the city's Versova Beach (5 1/2 feet thick of plastic bags and other waste - watch the video). Determined to do something about it, the pair started

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The PEG Board – continued



cleaning up the beach themselves. Every weekend since, Shah has inspired volunteers to join him. To date, they have removed 5 million kg of plastic from the beaches. He also talks to each individual in the slums and 80% of the 5000 people he has talked to have gone plastic free - purely by human to human interaction. Please watch the ~2 minute video - it is well worth your time:

<http://web.unep.org/championsofearth/laureates/2016/afr/oz-shah>. This impressive effort inspired Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make beach cleanups part of the Clean India surge.

Left: Cooperative “plogging”. ADF&G and NOAA staff plog together during a dog walk.

There were many other wonderful organizations, including those trying to ban plastic bags, reduce single-use plastics through the zero waste initiative, reduce the use of plastic straws, and more. I think the overall message from the conference was that it is going to take every single one of us to do our part to stop the plastic epidemic. Jack Johnson, an amazing musician, ended the conference singing “We are better together” and I wholeheartedly agree.



RECYCLE

Above: a 49' whale made of plastic with plastic spilling out of it's mouth created by Greenpeace in the Philippines. In February, a young male sperm whale was found dead in Spain with 64 lbs. of garbage in its digestive tract, one of many sperm whales found dead with copious ingested plastic.



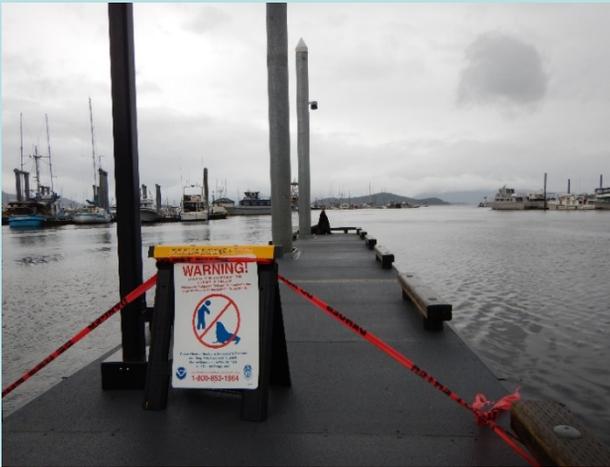
California Sea Lions, Steller Sea Lions, and the Gap Between Them

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

While on a March 21 herring survey, ADF&G biologists took a moment to check out Bieli Rocks near Sitka for the presence of sea lions. When they stopped by the Rocks in 2017, they were justifiably surprised that 4 of the 5 or 6 bulls hauled out were California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*). In 2018, the only sea lion they saw on the Rocks was the carcass of a California sea lion. Fishery biologist Dave Harris managed to capture some striking photos of a bald eagle scavenging on the carcass.



Photos top right and lower right courtesy Dave Harris, ADF&G.



While not common, California sea lions are not a rarity in Alaska. In September of 2017, Juneau NMFS PRD staff took turns shooing a recalcitrant CA sea lion off the docks of the main harbor in town (*upper left* with the offending animal in the background). In March of 2018, while scoping for entanglements at the Benjamin Island haul-out north of Juneau, the iconic honking bark of a California sea lion could be easily heard above the grunts and protests of the 500 or so Steller sea lions at the site.

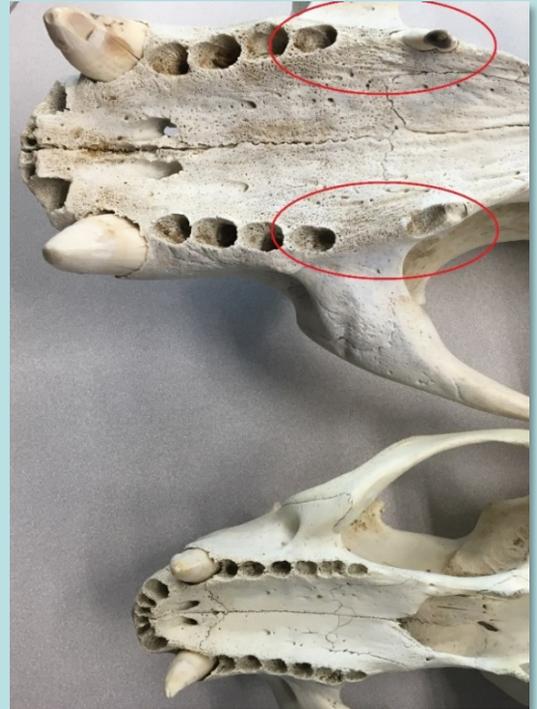
Aside from vocalizations, California sea lions may be easily distinguished from Steller sea lions by a number of characteristics, including a long, pointed and narrow snout and smaller size. The carcass found at Bieli Rocks was identified in the photograph by the dark brown to blackish color, the first and fifth digits of the hind flippers being longer than the other digits, and the more diminutive foreflippers (*upper right*).

California Sea Lions, Steller Sea Lions, and the Gap Between Them - continued

If the carcass was an adult male, then the lack of a mane and presence of a pronounced sagittal crest in the California sea lion would also be apparent, as compared to the mane and broad, flat skull of an adult male Steller sea lion.

Another anatomical difference that is less apparent, and slightly perplexing, is the presence or absence of a diastema. The simplest definition of the term diastema is “a space between teeth”. A definition that works for many, if not most, terrestrial mammals is, “a space separating teeth of different functions, especially that between the biting teeth (incisors and canines) and grinding teeth (premolars and molars)”. This is equally accurate when applied to the wide diastema of ungulates or rodents as it is to the narrow diastema of domestic and wild cats and dogs. Many pinnipeds, such as harbor seals, Northern fur seals and California sea lions do not have a diastema.

Right: the Steller sea lion diastema (circled in red) compared to no diastema in the upper jaw of a Northern fur seal. Photo courtesy NMFS.



Above: A wide-mouthed view of a Steller sea lion diastema. The rearmost post-canines are the only teeth that face backwards, which may offer a feeding advantage. Photo courtesy Sanctuary Cruises.

Steller sea lions, on the other hand, have a diastema in an unusual location. The Steller sea lion dental formula is $I \ 3/2, C \ 1/1, PC \ 5/5$. This translates to 3 upper incisors, 1 canine and 5 post-canines on each side of the maxilla, or upper jaw, and 2 incisors, 1 canine and 5 post-canines on each side of the mandible, or lower jaw. Interestingly, the diastema in Steller sea lions lies between the fourth and fifth post-canines. The difference in diastemal length in terrestrial mammals is thought to be a result of evolutionary changes stemming from bite forces (Greaves 2008). It is likely the same is true for Steller sea lions in some capacity.

News from AVPS

by Kathy Burek

The biggest news is that we have a new Technician!!! Her name is Sonia Kumar and she is very excited to work for AVPS and to be a part of the Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network. She can be contacted by phone (303) 570-9898 or email svk234@gmail.com. Please contact her regarding samples and setting up necropsy trainings.



Left: here is Sonia, nice and grubby, after assisting with a beluga necropsy at Potter's Marsh.

With the start of the new year, we are starting with a new Prescott grant, similar to the ones we have received in the past. These are designed to offer trainings for higher level necropsies and to assist network members in working up cases to include Level B and C data. We are in the process of working out times and places in Kodiak and Juneau for necropsy trainings this summer/fall. We received interest from those regions during the Stranding Network meeting and those areas members have requested additional instruction. We are hoping to have folks from Petersburg and Tenakee come up to join us in Juneau for the training. Stay tuned for dates, times, and places. If there are other groups interested, please contact Sonia Kumar at svk234@gmail.com or Kathy Burek at avps.kbh@gmail.com. With these trainings coming up, we will need **folks to start collecting carcasses that we can transport to these sites**, so please let us know about possible carcasses we can use in the trainings. We are also teaching our Biol490L class this summer at the University of Alaska in Anchorage during the second 5 week session.

We do still maintain the google site (<https://sites.google.com/site/akvetpath>) if you need documents for necropsies or instructions for shipping. We also provide case management for the network. Since we are all on the same permit, I am assuming that if you send me a carcass or tissues that you want me to send tissues out to various labs. If you have properly collected samples that you would like to send to us to manage, please contact Sonia. **PLEASE** be sure and label each sample with the animal ID and the tissue type and put them in bags with the animal ID (double labelling is best) and the date of collection. We will disperse the samples to different labs and if there isn't a label, the sample will have to be discarded. **PLEASE** include the level A form so we have data to go along with the samples. Please contact Sonia for a list of labs and materials we send out routinely.

Call for carcasses! Please let Kathy or Sonia know if you have a carcass that can be used for necropsy training!

Announcements, Updates and FYIs

ASLC HAZWOPER update:

Since the last update we have held 5 workshops:

- Oregon Zoo (March 6th and 7th) - 31 people
- AZA mid-year conference in Jacksonville, FL (March 24th and 25th)- 14 people
- Alaska SeaLife Center - for NPS employees (April 23rd and 24th) - 12 people
- The Alaska Zoo - Anchorage, AK (April 26th and 27th) - 18 people
- The Baltimore Zoo in Maryland (May 5th and 6th - this is the weekend before the EOW conference and some conference attendees will be coming) - 19 people

Upcoming workshop:

- Texas State Aquarium - Corpus Christi, TX (June 19th and 20th) - registration for this one has not opened yet

We have trained over 200 people! We will continue to provide HAZWOPER 8hr Refresher training at no cost for rest of the year. For more information, contact Jamie Auletta (jamiea@alaskasealife.org).

Large Whale Disentanglement Reminder...

As a result of a human casualty in Canada during a large whale disentanglement effort in 2017, modifications to that program remain in place. Until further notice, large whale disentanglement activities are authorized on a case-by-case basis and only under the supervision of a Level 5 responder.

Network Member Recent Publications:

- Davison, A.J., O. Nielsen, K. Subramaniam, J.M. Jacob, C.H. Romero, K.A. Burek-Huntington and T.B. Waltzek. 2017. Genome Sequence of an Alpha herpesvirus from a Beluga Whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) [Genome Announc.](#) 19(5): 42.
- Stimmelmayer, R., G.M. Ylitalo, G. Sheffield, K.B. Beckman, K..A. Burek-Huntington, V. Metcalf and T. Rowles. 2018. Oil fouling in three subsistence-harvested ringed (*Phoca hispida*) and spotted seals (*Phoca largha*) from the Bering Strait region, Alaska: Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon bile and tissue levels and pathological findings. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 130: 311-323.

UME updates

Ice Seal UME: The UME Working Group voted to close the UME. Closure memos are currently moving through the clearance process.

Large Whale UME: Closed. The AK Large Whale UME Closure memo was signed December 8, 2017. The Summary Report has been posted at:

<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/node/154>

Announcements, Updates and FYIs - continued

From the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History:

Just to introduce myself, I am Dr. Michael McGowen, the new Curator of Marine Mammals at the Smithsonian. As part of taking over the reins here, I would like to build and rebuild connections with stranding networks across the country and make ourselves known as a place that is eager to take in new specimens, especially tissues. I would like to emphasize that we are the national collection that should represent all regions of the country. We currently house over 13,000 specimens of marine mammals, one of the largest in the world.

However, although we do have Pacific representation, our collection is heavily skewed toward specimens from the Eastern North Atlantic (for obvious geographic reasons). In addition, I have noticed that we also lack tissues from many common North American marine mammals (for example, we have no tissue from otariids). Therefore, two major things I would like to build upon is adding to the Alaskan representation in our collection, both in terms of skeletal material of some species and in terms of tissue for any species.

Two projects that I am embarking on include the genomics of pinnipeds, in which myself and collaborators would like to sequence the genomes of all pinnipeds to address questions such as comparative population genetics between restricted and common species, evolution of sexual dimorphism, and the genomics of secondary adaptation to an aquatic environment. In addition, in the future, I would like to conduct genomic studies of marine mammal ectoparasites, especially cyamids. So, I am eager to build up a collection of these, as well.

Any costs for materials needed to gather materials (such as tubes, ethanol, RNAlater) can be contributed by the Smithsonian, as well as any shipping.

Ranked Order of things we would like:

1. Tissue in any form from any species in Alaskan waters (especially pinnipeds!).
2. Skeletal specimens of seals (bearded, ribbon, spotted) and beluga from Alaskan waters
3. Any ectoparasites from any marine mammal
4. If there is any way to get incredibly fresh tissues from potentially euthanized animals for RNA studies, this would be much appreciated. Fresh tissues can be used for studies of gene expression, and I would potentially like to investigate comparative gene expression in marine mammals.

Thank you,
Michael McGowen, PhD
mcgowenm@si.edu

Interested Network
Members should feel free
to contact Dr. McGowen
directly if you'd like more
information.

Announcements, Updates and FYIs - continued

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) is under Review:

Do you have ideas how the program at large can be improved? Are there aspects that are working really well that don't need to be changed? Now's your chance to speak up.

The Notice of Intent that the MMHSRP is preparing a new Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) published April 2 in the Federal Register. The public comment period is open from now until June 1, 2018, and comments can be submitted electronically at: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2018-0036> or via mail at the address provided in the FR notice.

There are still 3 more scoping meetings planned - 2 virtual (webinar) and 1 in person in Silver Spring, MD. The dates are as follows:

1. May 15, 2018, 3:30 p.m. EDT—Webinar (Registration Required)
2. May 18, 2018, 10:30.a.m. EDT—(valid ID compliant with the REAL ID Act required) – NOAA Science Center, 1301 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD
3. May 21, 2018, 3:00 p.m. EDT—Webinar (Registration Required)

Attendance at a scoping meeting (webinar or in-person) is free, but you must pre-register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mmhsrp-peis-scoping-webinars-tickets-43403127924>.



Photo Contest Winner

It wasn't until the 2018 Marine Debris Conference that Kim Raum-Suryan, Lauri Jemison and Kate Savage were told they were the subjects in a photo that won the Grand Prize in a DC photo competition. More information at:

<http://dc.ecowomen.org/2017/05/26/who-are-the-mentors>

Once again THANK YOU in advance for your hard work during the upcoming stranding season. Many calls come in to NMFS from all over the state, demonstrating a true team effort to respond to stranded animals in Alaska. Thank you for your help! A reminder to please submit any level As, photos, and necropsy reports within 30 days to:

Kate.Savage@noaa.gov

Your reports allow us to track marine mammal health in Alaska and beyond.

MESSAGE BOARD

Have a quick note, something you'd like highlighted, a request to the network, or a quick kudos or shout-out? Consider using our new message board. We've pulled a couple notes we saw from this newsletter and included them here. Be sure to check out the stories for more details!

NMFS is tracking sightings of ringed seals in the Aleutians and thin, or otherwise unusual, gray whales. Please share your reports.

DON'T FORGET:

Public comments are being accepted about the MMHSRP until June 1. See page 17 for details.

ASLC IS OFFERING HAZWOPER TRAININGS. SEE PAGE 15 FOR MORE.

Kudos

Go to page 6 to read about a successful *OFF* investigation!

See page 15 for new publications from our stranding network members.

AVPS is planning necropsy trainings in Kodiak and Juneau and are looking for carcasses. See page 14 for more.

The Smithsonian is interested in working with Alaska stranding network members. See page 16 for info.

TUNDRA

by Chad Carpenter

SCIENTISTS HAVE LONG BEEN BAFLED BY WHY WHALES THAT BEACH THEMSELVES ARE PREDOMINATELY MALE.

I GUESS MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE ASKED FOR DIRECTIONS...

