Alaska Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network

Spring/Summer 2019 Newsletter

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In this issue:

Greetings from the Coordinator

by Barbara Mahoney, NMFS

Greetings from the Stranding Coordinator Barbara Mahoney

The Alaska marine mammal stranding response has a long history in Alaska, predating the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), with stranding records as far back as the 1950s. Our continued collaboration allows us to better understand the marine world as we learn from these stranding events.

As we prepare for the 2019 season, we can briefly revisit the marine mammal volunteer stranding network.

NMFS National Mammal Stranding Network, created under the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, was formalized in the 1992 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network authorizes Alaska organizations with their trained responders, veterinarians, and volunteers to respond to and rehabilitate live stranded marine mammals, and investigate dead marine mammals. NMFS has jurisdiction over whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions. Members of our Stranding Network have Stranding Agreements with NMFS and can respond to marine mammal stranding events along the Alaska coast, as part of our nationwide program.

Each year there are hundreds of stranded marine mammals reported in Alaska. Each stranded animal provides an opportunity to collect important information about the species and its environment, which contributes to scientific research and/or public education. Our coordinated stranding responses allows NMFS to: monitor human caused mortalities and stranding rates; monitor harmful alga blooms; maintain a stranding database; determine cause of death (when possible); investigate Unusual Mortality Events; and help monitor the health of the populations and our marine ecosystems.

The stranding information is also important to NMFS' mandates under the MMPA and the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Please contact NMF staff with questions related to ESA listed stranded marine mammals.

So, as we prepare for the 2019 stranding season, I wish us all a healthy and safe summer. The challenges we meet are greatly appreciated, as we learn and care about the marine populations.

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.

Glacier Bay & Icy Strait Humpback Whale Population Monitoring: 2018 Update

By Janet Neilson, Chris Gabriele, and Lou Taylor-Thomas

Hot-off-the-press! Results from Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve's humpback whale monitoring program in 2018 are now available online (https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2259827). This was our 34th consecutive year of data collection in Glacier Bay and Icy Strait, where National Park Service biologists have been conducting photo ID based surveys every summer since 1985.

Key Findings from 2018:

- We documented 100 unique humpback whales in Glacier Bay and Icy Strait, our lowest annual count since 2002 (Fig. 1). This downtrend trend has been most dramatic in Glacier Bay, where we identified only 45 whales in 2018, a 72% decline compared to our record high count of 161 whales in 2013!
- We documented only one mother/calf pair in 2018 but by mid-August the mother had lost her calf, marking total reproductive failure for the first time in this 34-year study.

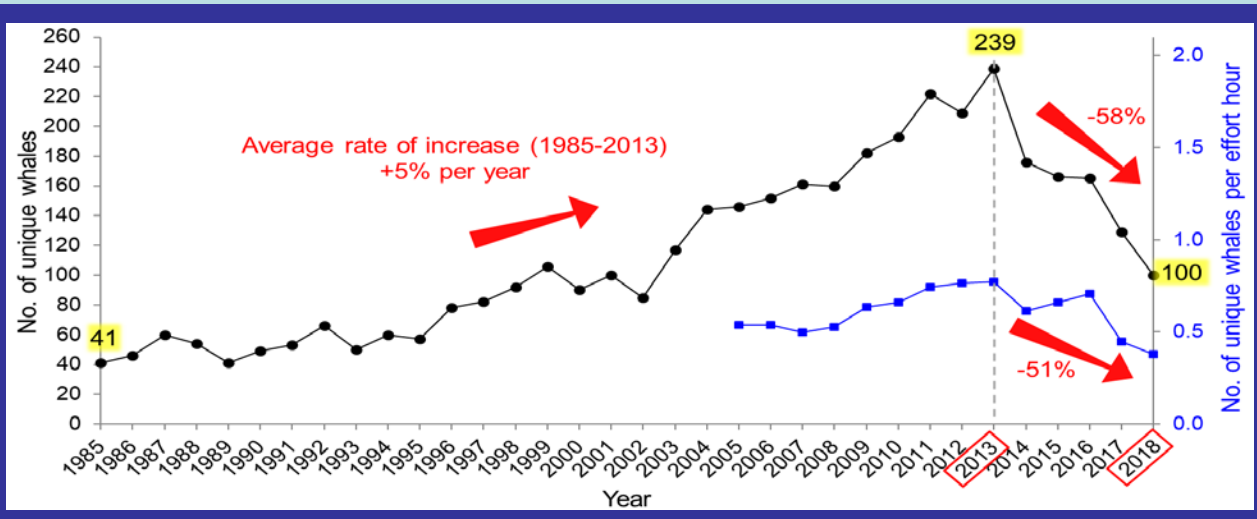


Figure 1. Humpback whale abundance in Glacier Bay & Icy Strait has declined by >50% since peaking in 2013. Annual whale counts (black) and annual whale counts corrected for survey effort (blue) from Jun 1 – Aug 31, 1985-2018. Whales/effort hour is not available for 1985-2004.

GBNP 2018 Update continued

- In 2018, over half (56%) of the whales that exhibited long-term site fidelity to GB-IS in 2004-2013 (n = 66) were not documented. However, a few of these well-known whales have returned to the study area (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The triumphant return of adult female #581 to the study area on June 20, 2018 after being missing 2014-2017. This female (first identified in 1982; Kewalo Basin Marine Mammal Laboratory unpublished data) holds the SE Alaska record for the most documented calves (13). (NPS/C. Gabriele, taken under NMFS ESA/MMPA Permit No. 21059)

- For the third year in a row, we observed numerous abnormally thin whales, however it appears this was less common than in 2017 (2016 = 13%; 2017 = 24%; 2018 = 17%).
- Although our monitoring results clearly indicate dramatic population level changes over the past five years, we do not know if the declines in whale numbers represent a shift in distribution and/or increased mortality from 2014-2018. Efforts to locate the whales missing from Glacier Bay and Icy Strait in catalogs from other feeding areas (e.g., British Columbia and Prince William Sound) have so far yielded no matches. Through a new collaboration with Happywhale.com, we recently initiated expanding our search area to the broader North Pacific.
- Our findings are consistent with negative trends in abundance, reproduction, and body condition for humpbacks in other areas in the central North Pacific. In November 2018, researchers from Alaska and Hawaii met in Honolulu to share results and discuss these broad declines.
- Within Alaska, the consistent, long-term, monitoring of humpback whales is limited to Glacier Bay and Icy Strait, although our findings are consistent with negative trends in abundance, reproduction, and body condition for humpbacks in other areas in the central North Pacific.
- Growing evidence suggests that recent declines in humpback whales and other marine species may be related to the unprecedented marine heatwave that occurred in the North Pacific from 2014-2016.

The following report summarizing humpback whale monitoring results from 2018 is now available:

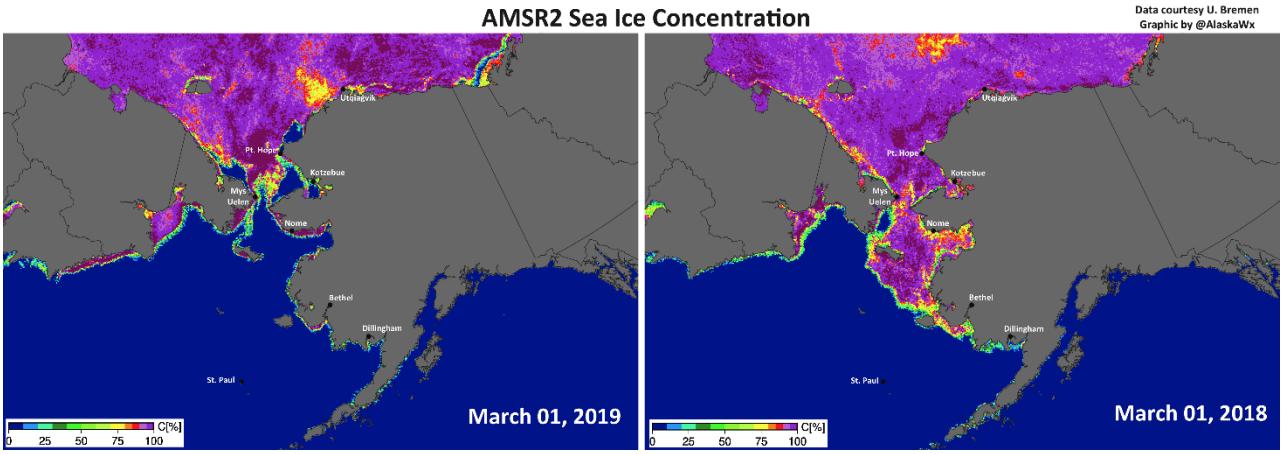
Neilson, J.L., and C.M. Gabriele. 2019. Glacier Bay & Icy Strait Humpback Whale Population Monitoring: 2018 Update. National Park Service Resource Brief, Gustavus, Alaska.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2259827 [692 K, 6 pages]

News from the North

From Gay Sheffield, Nome and the Bering Strait:

During winter 2017- 2018 the extraordinary period of open water in the northern Bering Sea began a cascading series of environmental events that signaled the transformation of two maritime ecosystems into one. During summer 2018, NOAA Fisheries RACE Division confirmed that the lack of winter sea ice resulted in the lack of the "thermal curtain" of cold water that separates the southern Bering Sea ecosystem (dominated by large predatory fish species) from the northern Bering Sea (dominated by small forage fish species). With no thermal barrier, the southern ecosystem was able to shift northwards resulting in many unusual observations throughout the Bering Strait region. Examples of a transitioning ecosystem included anomalous marine mammal strandings (i.e. Dall's porpoise), several novel mass strandings involving ice-associated seal species, unusual fish species observed, unusual movements/numbers of local fish species, and an extensive, long-duration, seabird die-off due to starvation.



For more information on some of the drastic changes in the Bering Sea and Bering Strait: https://alaskaseagrant.org/2018/11/29/we-have-never-been-here-before-gay-sheffield-on-ecosystem-wide-changes-in-the-bering-sea/

Ringed seal update…

Some of you may recall the marked increase in yearling ringed seals observed in the southern Bering Sea, most notably Dutch Harbor, between December of 2017 and May of 2017. Many of these animals appeared thin, many had alopecia to varying extents, several had other evidence of external pathology. Behaviors ranged from alert and skittish to lethargic and moribund (i.e. in terminal decline). Of the five animals that were considered moribund, three died before or after transport to the Alaska SeaLife Center (ASLC), and the remaining two are currently in good health at the ASLC.

In an attempt to determine whether a facsimile of the event was occurring in 2019, NMFS sent flyers out to communities throughout the southern Bering Sea requesting that community members report any ringed seal sightings. Thus far, we have received no reports of ringed seals located in these communities and the pinnipeds that have been reported – harbor seals and/or spotted seals – have appeared to be healthy.

From Raphaela Stimmelmayr, North Slope Borough:

On Aug 20, Raphaela Stimmelmayr reported an “eared seal up north”, an unbranded 8-9 foot adult male Steller sea lion laying on the beach about 13 km south of Utqiagvik. The animal had lots of scars, a possibly injured right eye, and appeared too exhausted to respond much to the presence of the observers. Billy Adams, one of Raphaela’s team members described it as “an old beach master that had many fights”.

Left: a male Steller sea lion rests on a beach in the far north. Photo courtesy R. Stimmelmayr

Within a few days, the animal had departed. According to Rice (1998), Steller sea lions are considered are noted as a “vagrant to Herschel Island in the Beaufort Sea”. According to Craig George, there is one account at the UAF Museum of a Steller sea lion on Herschel Island, but he is not aware of an SSL sighting near Barrow in the last 30-40 years.

Right: the same Steller sea lion, apparently rejuvenated, right before departure. Photo courtesy unidentified hunter.

Rice, D. 1998. Marine Mammals of the World: Systematics and Distribution. Issue 4 of Specialpublication, Society for Marine Mammology, Universirty of California, 231 pages.

Photo opp…

Left: A young elephant seal that showed up in Seward on April 2. The ASLC team that responded found the yearling to be in good shape, but going through a rough molt. The blue flipper tag allowed them to track the youngster through Dr. Colleen Reichmuth, Long Marine Lab pinniped researcher, who identified the animal as a weaned pup that was tagged at the King’s Ranch colony in California on 3/25/2018.
Photo courtesy ASLC.

Ocean Guardian School

By Alicia Schuler, NMFS

Two schools in the Juneau School Distinct are working hard to become Alaska's first Ocean Guardian Schools! The Ocean Guardian Program, run by NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Service, encourages school to commit to protecting and conservation local watersheds and the world's oceans by implementing a school-based conservation project. Aleria Jensen and Kim Raum-Suryan from NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region were essential to launching this program in Alaska and Ali Schuler (Sea Grant Fellow) has been instrumental in this year's success. This school year, Sayéik: Gastineau Community School and Thunder Mountain High School have worked to reduce single-use plastic in their schools. Sayéik: Gastineau Community School has successfully replaced plastic sporks with metal silverware, while Thunder Mountain has fundraised to purchase reusable water bottles. Each school has also educated students and their families about marine debris and plastic waste by kicking off the school year with a school assembly, conducting waste audits during lunch, and working to improve their recycling programs. Students from Sayéik: Gastineau Community School will also appear this month on KTOO: A Juneau Afternoon to educate the Juneau community about the impacts of marine debris on marine organisms. Both schools will wrap up the school year with a student-led assembly to present their accomplishments. Generous donations by Litter Free Inc., Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership, and the Audubon Society Chapter in Juneau have allowed for Sayéik: Gastineau Community School to purchase dishwashing equipment and buses for a beach clean-up and Thunder Mountain High School to buy recycle bins and marine debris bracelets for fundraising.

The first Alaska Ocean Guardian Consortium took place at the end of March. Interested teachers in Juneau from Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School and Floyd Dryden Middle School came to learn about the Ocean Guardian School program and discuss launching the program in their own schools!

The program has already made a difference in the community of Juneau, it will be exciting to see the impact it has as it continues to grow!

Photo opp...

Left: The first stranding report in 2019 was of an adult female ribbon seal observed on a Tin City road about a mile inland. The seal was soon found dead. A necropsy revealed severe dehydration and diarrhea, which was tentatively considered the cause of death. Photo courtesy Arctec Alaska.

Wilderness Medicine & Entanglement Response

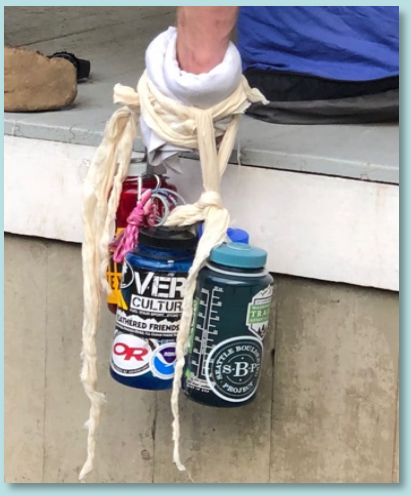
by Fred Sharpe, Alaska Whale Foundation

I recently had the good fortune of completing an eight-day Wilderness First Responder [WFR] course through the National Outdoor Leadership School. I became intrigued by the crossover between whale entanglements and field medicine, and kindly wanted to share some observations.

1). Safety: In both disciplines, the safety of responders supersedes all other considerations. Additional casualties do nothing for the patient, and injury to a disentangler could result in suspension of network activities. Both field medicine and disentangling require a good measure of improvisation. However, the standardization of entanglement gear caches, reduces ad-libbing and increases efficiency.

2) Consent: We obviously cannot seek verbal permission from a distressed whale. however, the victim's body language (calm, agitated, evasive or thrashing) provides important cues whether or not to approach (don't forget the love tap with the pole to assess responsiveness!).

3) Life threats: With human patients, the responder makes subjective assessments by soliciting feedback from the victim, and makes objective evaluations by addressing life threats (ABCDE] and a head to toe exam [spine, bones, shock]. Whales in contrast, require rapid assessment (at as safe distance) with GoPro's, drones and visual evaluation. This allows us to document gear type, configuration and severity and assess body condition via lice burden, infection, bleeding and level of responsiveness).



4) Changing Patient Status: Expect the patient's condition to change during the event, including habituation or becoming fed up and ornery! As gear is removed from the animal, they may start to become restless, so always leave an out by avoiding danger zones (forward of the animal & abeam/above of the flukes.

Wilderness Medicine & Entanglement Response - continued

5) Documentation: Designating a note-taker to jot-down events expedites reporting and aids in the after-action analysis. Most importantly, documentation expands our database of gear types, allowing us to provide feedback to fishers for voluntary gear modification. Public outreach including reporting cards and posted hotlines that expand vigilance among ocean users, and greatly facilitate public reporting.

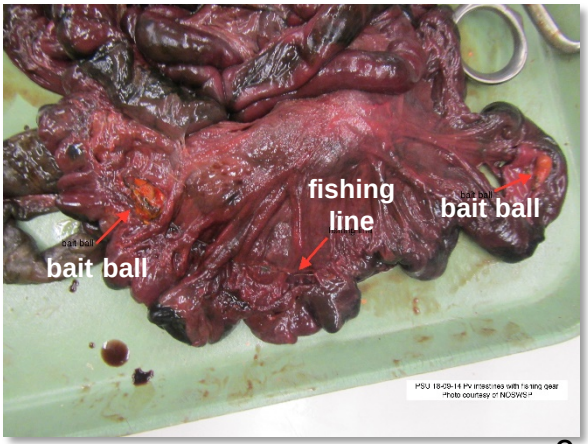
Advanced first aid is an indispensable skill for a whale disentanglers. By practicing safe operations at sea, and carefully following disentanglement protocols, may the expertise of these two disciplines never be needed simultaneously!

Photo opp...

Below: An adult male harbor seal necropsied on Long Beach Washington on Sept. 15, 2018 with intestines perforated by fishing gear.

The gear consisted of what appeared to be two crusty bait balls with fishing line connecting the two balls. When the bait balls were removed, a very small lure was revealed on one end and a ball of fishing line on the other end. The length of the line between the two balls was about 26 cm long. There was also a rectangular-shaped fishing weight with a leader attached to one end recovered from inside the stomach.

According to Dalin t D'Alessandro of Portland State University Northern Oregon/Southern Washington Marine Mammal Stranding Program (NOSWSP), this is the typical type of damage that they see in the harbor seals in their area that have ingested fishing gear. The gear pulls on the intestines like an accordion until the line perforates the intestines. Photos and report courtesy D. D'Alessandro.



A Whale of a Question

by Kate Savage, NMFS

In March of 2019, Andy Szabo and crew were conducting some drone/body condition sampling in Sitka and encountered a humpback that appeared to be bleeding from the genital region. The whale was slapping its flukes at the surface a lot (they initially thought it was in response to their drone), both right side up and upside down (see photos below). From the footage, they were only able to see blood in the water when the animal was right side up. The shots were 10 seconds apart at the most. There was no obvious sign of injury, and when they encountered the same whale again a few days later she was behaving normally.

Cetacean experts were asked to share their thoughts on the nature and source of the rust-colored discharge. Here are some of the comments:

- Two pooping bouts in quick succession?
- Blood from gi or reproductive tract, possibly intestinal or reproductive tract pathology, or maybe an abortion. Given the time of year it would be early stage of pregnancy I imagine, if latter? I'm not really surprised there was no blood when it was on its back, if it was bleeding quite slowly, once it had expelled a bunch ventrally, it would take a while for the rectum to refill before it would overflow when it was on its back maybe
- Colitis
- I'm pretty sure that's poop... looks exactly like it, and it doesn't look like blood. I've never published this - mostly because I don't want to be forever called the Whale Shit Theory Guy - but I have on various occasions seen whales engaging in repeated high-energy behaviors like this on a feeding ground, which cease after the whale has defecated. I know lobtailing, breaching etc have multiple functions, but I'm convinced that in some cases prolonged bouts of such behaviors are intended to stimulate defecation. I've seen whales in the Gulf of Maine breach, lobtail etc >100 times in a row, then crap, and move on. I'd guess that's what's happening here.

Whale Question - continued

- Color redder than typical feces. Blood mixed with poop

- Feeding on herring or krill? If herring, I would expect browner shades of feces, which points towards blood. (*Answer: Prey is pre spawning/overwintering herring*)

- I can't beat the Whale Shit Theory (impressive!) and I don't know if your humpback was bleeding or pooping, but this a bit reminiscent of a sighting I had of a bleeding gray whale in 2006. On July 11, 2006 as I followed behind a gray whale in Glacier Bay I noticed that it emitted a bloody discharge -- here's an excerpt from an email I sent at the time:

  "The whale appeared healthy and was traveling out of the bay at ~3 kts on 2-3 minute fluke up dives. After watching it for several surfacings, I noticed that on one of its fluke up dives it appeared to defecate. I drove over to the area to see if I could find any feces and instead I found clots of blood floating in the water. I have seen reddish colored humpback feces after they have been feeding on krill and this was definitely different, definitely blood, with what might have been small bits of tissue (gray-brown in color)."

  See photo below of the material I collected with a handheld dip net. Kathy Burek and Stephen Raverty helped us work up and interpret this sample. In this case, the material likely originated in the colon. Stephen wrote, " detection of the clostridium difficile toxins suggests a possible bacterial toxin may have been produced with subsequent injury to intestinal wall and bleeding. “

  Interestingly, this gray whale was matched by Cascadia to a known individual with sightings through 2013, so whatever was causing the bleeding was not fatal.

Whale Question - continued

- In my humble opinion, it's likely that this whale was pooping, but it could be blood (or bloody poop) it's hard to know without the opportunity for a sample. If it was blood, I would think that there'd be some trace of it aside from the distinct emissions. Regarding the color, it's good to recall that there's a video system interpreting the color, so it may not be the same as what you'd have seen with the naked eye. So maybe that's why it seems redder than you'd expect for krill poop. It would be good to know more about the color sensor of the video.

- I have to confess that I had the same "poop or blood" question about the beautiful humpback whale mother and calf footage that circulated in January: https://www.Hawaii.edu/news/2019/01/31/rare-video-of-newborn-humpback-whale

Aerial photograph of a blue whale in the Gulf of Corcovado, Chile. The red defecation indicates recent feeding on krill. Photo by John Durban (NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center) and Michael Moore (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution) taken from a small hexacopter at an altitude of 190ft, as part of a photogrammetry study to measure whale size and body condition. Research conducted under Chilean Permit MERI-488-FEB-2015.

A huge note of thanks to Andy Szabo, Fabien Vivier, Phil Clapham, Michael Moore, Frances Gulland, John Moran, Jan Straley, Janet Neilson, and Igor Von Trapp.

The Parts Guy

By Dave Gann, NMFS

Greetings and salutations Dear Reader. Please allow me to introduce myself: My name is David Gann - but that is not important. What is important is what I do. Or rather, what I can do for you. You see, I am the NMFS contact responsible for issuing our Regional Authorization letters for marine mammal parts.

What's a "part"? Well, marine mammal parts are defined by MMPA regulations:

"Hard part" - any bone, tooth, baleen, treated pelt, or other part of a marine mammal that is relatively solid (excludes fossils)

"Soft part" - any marine mammal part that is not a hard part. Soft parts:

- Do not include excreted urine or feces*
- Do include blood, blood constituents, body fluids that are secreted (e.g., mucus, saliva) and organic compounds isolated from these; cell lines; and DNA**

*Permits are required to collect urine and feces if take will occur

**Replicated DNA is not regulated as a part

Any collection of dead marine mammals and their parts is considered "take" and is prohibited under the MMPA and the ESA, depending on the listing status of the species. "But hey, Dave…" I can hear you say, "I need some parts for _____! How am I supposed to do my job if I can't get marine mammal parts!? Isn't there some way you could help me out?"

Well friend, I'm so glad you asked! The MMPA and ESA provide mechanisms to authorize taking and receiving parts from live or dead animals:

Scientific research and enhancement permits, and

Authorizations

Each of these has certain and specific activities associated with it, and either (or both) may be required depending on the situation. It can get pretty complicated trying to figure out which you need and how to go about getting started- but that's where I can help. Just send me a request at david.gann@noaa.gov detailing what you need, when you need it, what it's for, etc., and I'll be happy to do my part. Heh - see what I did there?

Photo opp…

Another "first" !

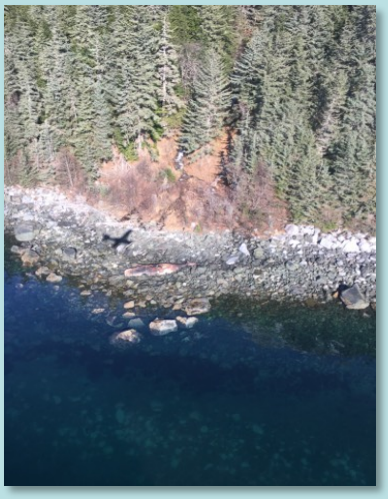
Aaron Lestenkof from St. Paul ECO/ Stranding team submitted a report and photo of a northern sea otter found by beach combers on Benson Beach on St. Paul on April 3. According to the Stranding team, this is the first documented Northern sea otter stranding in St. Paul.

Photo courtesy Aaron Lestenkof.

A Sperm Whale in Southeast Inside Waters

by Kate Savage, NMFS

The number of stranding reports received by NMFS in 2019 started off at a leisurely pace. By the end of March we had only four reports as compared to 16 in 2018 and seven in 2017. However, while strandings increased very quietly, one of the four reports generated a great deal of interest and excitement.



On March 19, a report was received through the Sitka Stranding team from a private pilot who observed a dead sperm whale in northern Lynn Canal. Word went out and late that afternoon a photo from Jacek Maselko, Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) biologist and private pilot confirmed the existence of the beached sperm whale

There was great cause for excitement. Less than three sperm whales are typically reported stranded each year in Alaska. The carcasses are almost invariably in locations not easily accessible and none have ever been documented in SEAK inside waters. Further, only two necropsies have been performed on sperm whales in the region since 1990.

Above: A beached carcass of a sperm whale north of Juneau. Photo courtesy J. Maselko

On March 20, a team of eight set out in the early morning aboard the AFSC M/V Sashin to necropsy the carcass. By the time the team arrived, a rising tide was lapping against the carcass. The team completed an external exam, morphometrics, and triaged samples collected.

Above: Dave Gann collects teeth from the lower jaw. Photo courtesy PRD.

Propeller/vessel strike was determined to be the likely cause of death based on the presence of three deep, parallel slices just cranial to the dorsal fin with associated vertebral fractures and soft tissue injury.

Left: The most cranial of three slices along the dorsum.

Sperm Whale - continued

Left: Johanna Vollenweider and Kate Savage identify bone fragments in one of the wounds. Photo courtesy PRD.

Right: Lauri Jemison and Lauren Wild collect blubber samples and start dissection for the ear bone. Photo courtesy D.Gann.

The team made plans to return to the carcass to complete the necropsy with stomach contents as a priority. Sperm whales have become associated with the ingestion of plastic, sometimes in sufficient volume to contribute to cause of death (see Spring 2018 newsletter). In Southeast Alaska, sperm whales have also been associated with depredation in the sablefish longline fishery. Lauren Wild, sperm whale researcher and Ph.D. candidate at UAF, has been working on the issue with the Southeast Alaska Sperm Whale Avoidance Project (SEASWAP) and identifying individual animals in the process. This whale was not in SEASWAP's catalog, and hence not one of the characterized longline bandits. By sifting through the stomach contents, the team was hoping to determine if the animal had been actively foraging and, if so, identify the prey items and whether items included plastic and sablefish otoliths/bony parts. The plan was also to collect remaining teeth, ear bone and spermaceti if time allowed.

Unfortunately, bad weather intervened and the team was not able to return until March 29.

Right: When the team returned most of the remaining lower jaw had been removed. Photo courtesy K. Savage.

A full exam of the injured site revealed severe tissue damage with vertebrae in disarray, multiple small and large vertebral fractures, and exposed spinal column.

Sperm Whale - continued

Upper right: The sight of injury decomposing and scavenged. *Upper left*: sheared and fractured vertebra. Photos courtesy J. Moran.

Left: The team was able to collect many squid beaks from the stomach. No plastic or bony parts were identified. The team was also successful in collecting the ear bone and spermaceti samples. Photo courtesy J. Moran.

None of the team members had necropsied a sperm whale before. Their dedication, enthusiasm and perseverance lead to a successful and informative event!

Above left: March 20 necropsy team. From left to right, top to bottom, Kate Savage, Kristin. Mabry, Jason Page, Johana Vollenweider, Jacek Maselko, Lauri Jemison, Lauren Wild, David Gann. Photo courtesy D. Gann.

Above right: March 29 necropsy team. From left to right: AliciaSchuler, SuzieTeerlink, Lauren Wild, Johanna Vollenweider, Pat Swedeen, Kate Savage, Julie Scheurer. Missing: John Moran. Photo courtesy J. Moran

News from AVPS

by Kathy Burek, AVPS

We just wanted to say “Hello” and update you with some news from Dr. Burek and Alaska Veterinary Pathology Services. We had a couple more necropsy trainings this fall, one after Whale Fest on Nov 6/7th and another in Juneau on November 16/17th. Each had 16 participants! Our first day included lectures on Level A collections, very basic information on levels B and C, and safety practices. On the second day, we had a wet lab with a necropsy demo and afterwards, participants broke into groups, with each group conducting a necropsy on their own animal. We also had a couple of presentations on what to do with the samples after the necropsy and a bit more on human interaction pathology. I think there was fun to be had by all and we learned quite a bit from each other. The presentations and documents produced for these trainings are on in Google folder. Please contact me if you’d like access.

Photos of the Sitka crew

News from the Alaska SeaLife Center

by Jamie Auletta, ASLC

From Kathy Woodie:

Infectious and contagious disease screening data from stranding cases admitted to the Alaska SeaLife Center was presented as two posters at the 2019 Alaska Marine Science Symposium in January. Natalie Rouse presented the poster "Serological Survey of Leptospirosis in Stranded Marine Mammals in Alaska 1998-2018" and Kathy Woodie presented the poster "Serology and Parasitology of Stranded Marine Mammals in Alaska 2013-2018."

Both posters include a map of Alaska indicating locations where diseased animals stranded. Additional analysis of this data set is pending and is likely to include analysis regarding emerging pathogens and comparison of this data set to historical sets. This work was made possible in part through generous funding from the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program and the SeaWorld Busch Gardens Conservation Fund. We would like to thank the AK stranding network partners for assistance with live stranded animals in their region, and stranding volunteers in Homer who help with initial assessments and retrieval of animals in Kachemak Bay. If you would like a digital copy of either poster to share with your local community please email kathyw@alaskasealiife.org.

Above: ASLC team members celebrate with UCSC PHOCAS project research collaborators at AMSS evening poster session.

From Jamie Auletta:

ASLC Mobile Response Infrastructure Deployment Drill
August 14-16th, 2019

This coming August, the Alaska SeaLife Center will be deploying its mobile oiled wildlife response infrastructure on the East side of Resurrection Bay to test equipment and remote operating procedures. The infrastructure being deployed will consist of 4 conex units and a Mobile Treatment and Rehabilitation Enclosure (MTRE). The 8' X 20' conex units, referred to as Mobile Response Units (MRUs), are comprised of one each food prep, vet clinic, staff support and utility unit. All units have been built with the option to plug into local infrastructure or run independently through the use of propane, gasoline generators, water bladders, water catchment pools and, pumps. We will be testing the ability of the units to run independently as if it were a remote response. This drill was made possible by a generous donation from Marathon Petroleum Corporation.

Announcements, Updates and FYIs

Introductions…

Welcome Rita!

My name is Rita Acker. I was born and raised in Barrow, Alaska. I come from a family with a strong subsistence hunting background. Camping in the summers with my parents and sisters, and whaling during Spring and Fall on my grandfather's whaling crew, ABC Crew. I love being outdoors and around animals, so it was my goal after graduating high school to pursue a career in Wildlife Biology. As a high school student I was given several opportunities to work with wildlife. I got to work with the NSB Department of Wildlife Management as OJT, assisting with the Bowhead Whale Census. I was also chosen to travel to IZEMBEC National Wildlife Refuge to participate in Steller's Eider banding in Cold Bay, Alaska for 2 consecutive years. This led to summer work with the USFWS, trekking the tundra to look for nesting Steller's Eiders. The next summer I was asked to work with the Owl Research Institute doing Snowy Owl studies. After graduating I enrolled at Iḷisaġvik College to pursue my Associate of Arts Degree, and also started working for the NSB Department of Wildlife Management as a Temp Hire. I continued schooling and was hired in a permanent position as Subsistence Research Specialist, which later changed to Subsistence Research Assistant. I worked for the next 6 years with Wildlife Management and graduated with my Associates of Arts Degree before I left work to focus on my family life. I took a 10 year hiatus to raise my 7 children. I returned to work with the NSB Dept. of Wildlife Management in April 2018, this time working under the Wildlife Veterinarian as their Wildlife Research Assistant. This is my dream job and I hope to continue in this field for years to come!

Welcome Aurelia Rose Deiman Good!

Congratulations to Melissa Good, Dutch Harbor Stranding Network member extraordinaire, on the birth of her daughter November 6 in Anchorage, 7lbs 2oz, 22in.

Right: Melissa shows Aurelia the ropes in responding to a sea otter stranding.

Announcements, Updates and FYIs - continued

Congratulations to Barb Lake, winner of the 2019 SSL FIA (Steller Sea Lion Flipper in the Air) Sweepstakes!!

On April 1, Barb was the first to hear from a caller concerned about jugging, one of the iconic signs that spring is in both the air and water in Alaska.

From Liz Ortiz of the Alaska Consortium of Zooarcheologists:

Our members are educators, students, trappers, native researchers, biologists, and professional archaeologists. Anyone with a legitimate interest in the study of animal bones, teeth, hair, and shell, particularly in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions are welcome to participate

As for collection expansion, we are currently looking for Ringed seals (P. hispida), Ribbon seals (P. fasciata), and Spotted seals (P. largha). Currently we have a single infant ringed seal, a neonate spotted, and no ribbon seal specimens. For research we have been having to borrow from other collections which is time consuming and costly. We would like to have a series of male and female adult animals, and a range of subadult specimens.

We do not need the specimens to be skeletonized to receive them. We have a necropsy table and processing equipment at our facility so frozen and fleshy is fine.

See **https://www.alaskazooarch.org** for more information.

Worth watching:

Alaska-focused (footage from Dutch Harbor and Sarkar Cove whales, both released during the Fall 2018):
https://players.brightcove.net/659677166001/4b3c8a9e-7bf7-43dd-b693-2614cc1ed6b7_default/index.html?videoId=6002816142001

National video with some Alaska footage:
https://videos.fisheries.noaa.gov/detail/videos/whales/video/6001380155001/teaming-up-for-entangled-whales?autoStart=true

Once again THANK YOU in advance for all your hard work during the upcoming stranding season. Many calls came 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.