
Alfaguara Project 2014

Report to Pacific Whale Foundation

Centro de Conservacion Cetacea



Introduction

The Alfaguara (blue whale) project is oriented to promote the effective conservation of blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) in Chile, as well as the development of high quality community-based fauna watching tourism.

Over the past eleven years, the Alfaguara Project has implemented bottom-up strategies to promote the conservation of the rich biodiversity of its marine life including fish, birds and marine mammal species.

Thanks to the cooperative work conducted by the local community, authorities and Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, Puñihuil has become a pioneer destination of sustainable community based tourism. It is the only tourist destination in Chile that has adopted regulations for fauna watching.



The dedicated scientific research program on blue whales of the Alfaguara Project has contributed important scientific information on the species, making it one of the best known populations of blue whales in the southern hemisphere.

The Alfaguara project is conducted with the support of the Chilean Navy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile. In 2014, the activities were conducted thanks to the sponsorship of Global Greengrant Funds and Pacific Whale Foundation.

Alfaguara Project 2014 Field Season

Between end of January and end of April 2014, the scientific research program of the Alfaguara project conducted six marine surveys off Isla de Chiloe, southern Chile. No surveys were conducted in April due to poor weather conditions. Thirty five groups of blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) comprising 44 individuals were recorded, as well as one group of two humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) and one group of two southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*). This last sighting was very important since the population of southern right whales in Chile is classified as Critically Endangered (IUCN) since only less than 50 mature individuals remain in the south east Pacific.



In addition, we also conducted one aerial survey with the support of the General Directorate of Maritime Territory and Marine Merchant (DIRECTEMAR) of the Chilean Navy. Due to bad weather conditions the aerial survey was restricted to the northern part of Los Lagos Region, leaving most of the survey area without coverage. As a result only one group of two adult blue whales were recorded.



While the average number of blue whales encountered during marine surveys in 2014 (1.2 individuals/hr) was slightly lower than in 2013 (2 ind/hr), it was considerable higher than in 2012, where the lowest of the 11 years of monitoring was recorded (0.3 ind/hr).



In addition, Isla de Chañaral, located in northern Chile has been monitored for blue whale presence in 2012 and 2013. However, in 2014 only about four blue whale sightings were reported by local tour operators during all the season (January to April) and during an opportunistic marine survey conducted by CCC in late April, only three fin whales were recorded.

Vessel Collision with Blue Whale



On February 2014, a dead blue whale was reported in Bahía de Puerto Montt to CCC by Hernan Ascencio, a member of the National Marine Mammal Sighting Network. The whale appeared near the coast line right after two large cruise vessels arrived to the port that morning.

Due to sanitary/health concerns, the whale was towed a short distance offshore from Pilluco by the Chilean Navy and released. However heavy wind conditions caused the whale to strand again at Isla Maillen, 10 km south of Puerto Montt.

We attended the stranding on three occasions to examine the whale, collect samples, record its measurements and take photographic records. The specimen was a 21m blue whale male, its right flipper was broken near the midpoint and the left mandible was also broken. Both fractures presented bone exposure. This evidence confirmed the whale died because of blunt force trauma caused by a large vessel ship strike, probably from one of the large cruise vessels.

After collecting blue whale samples and data, CCC coordinated the necessary actions to net the carcass of the whale and sink its body near the coast in order to rescue the skeleton in 2015 for scientific and educational purposes. This was a cooperative effort conducted in conjunction with the Chilean Navy, the Municipality of Puerto Montt, the National Fisheries Service and Oxcean maritime company.

Recreational Carrying Capacity Study

Since 2013, CCC has been working with local community operators (Ecoturismo Puñihuil) to update the recreational carrying capacity study conducted six years ago that served as the foundation to adopt and implement the first regulations in the Chile for coastal/marine fauna watching. The 2013 study collected information regarding the quality of the marine based tourism as well as information to determine the carrying capacity not only of boat based tours but for the entire Puñihuil-Pumillahue area to received tourists, with the aim that tourist activities are compatible with the conservation of the environment and ensure they are sustainable and are conducted with high quality standards.



The results were presented to Puñihuil community and local authorities in February 2014 and although it showed a significant overall improvement in tourist services, quality and facilities, it also highlighted an insufficient capacity of sanitary services and a significant decrease over the past three years in the tourist perception regarding landscape and biodiversity. These issues were discussed in depth during the presentation and actions are being developed to guarantee the conservation of this unique natural area.

Capacity Building in Northern Chile



Reglamento para el Avistaje de Especies Marinas en Chile
Promulgado el 16 Febrero de 2011 - Vigente desde el 16 de Febrero de 2013

Ballenas Delfines y Cachalotes

RESPECTAR
Distancias

ACERCARSE
por detrás y en forma paralela a los animales

ALEJARSE
en forma lenta y dirección contraria a los animales

- En caso de detención, mantener siempre el motor en marcha y en neutro
- Al avistar un grupo de animales, evitar cambios bruscos de velocidad, dirección o curso
- Al avistar madres con cría, acercarse con precaución siempre por el costado de la madre y no interponer entre la madre y la cría

Ante cambios conductuales, abandonar el lugar a una distancia de:

- 500 metros para ballenas azul
- 200 metros para otros cetáceos mayores
- 100 metros para cetáceos menores

NO PERTURBAR conductas de:
ALIMENTACION
REPRODUCCION
CRIANZA
REPOSO
TRANSITO

OBJETIVO

Garantizar comportamiento respetuoso con los animales

Asegurar resguardo de las especies observadas

Asegurar seguridad de los turistas

CAPITANES deben asegurar que:

- NO se generen ruidos molestos a bordo (guitarras, bocinas, amplificadores, etc.)
- NO se alimente a los animales
- NO arrojar ningún tipo de desperdicio al mar
- NO tocar a los animales

SE PROHIBE USO NAVES UNIPERSONALES
Como motor de popa
Jet ski o similares

FISCALIZAN
Servicio Nacional de Pesca (SERNAPESCA)
Armada de Chile
Carabineros de Chile

CETACEOS USUALMENTE AVISTADOS EN CHANARAL DE ACEITUNO

Ballena azul
Balaenoptera musculus

Ballena de aleta
Balaenoptera physalus

Ballena jorobada
Megaptera novaeangliae

Delfín nariz de botella
Tursiops truncatus

Delfín oscuro
Lagenorhynchus obscurus

Delfín de Risso
Stenella gignea

TODAS LAS ESPECIES DE CETACEOS EN CHILE SE ENCUENTRAN PROTEGIDAS POR LA LEY 20.2093 O LEY CETACEA

LOBOS MARINOS CHUNGUNGOS Y PINGÜINOS
Se aplican mismas maniobras de acercamiento que para cetáceos
Distancia mínima de aproximación: 50 METROS
Ante cambios conductuales negativos, alejarse a mínimo 100 METROS
NO PERTURBAR animales alimentándose, reproduciéndose y con crías

Centro de Conservación Cetacea
www.ccc-chile.org

Logos: NODO TURISMO, CORFO, Chile, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, Brasil, Ecuador, Colombia, Perú, Venezuela, México, Costa Rica, Panamá, República Dominicana, Haití, Cuba, España, Portugal, Francia, Italia, Alemania, Reino Unido, Irlanda, Países Bajos, Bélgica, Luxemburgo, Austria, Hungría, República Checa, Polonia, Eslovaquia, República Eslovaca, Hungría, Rumanía, Bulgaria, Grecia, Turquía, Chipre, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaiyán, Bielorrusia, Ucrania, Rusia, Kazajistán, Kirguistán, Tayikistán, Uzbekistán, Afganistán, Pakistán, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldivas, Indonesia, Tailandia, Vietnam, Laos, Camboya, Myanmar, Filipinas, Malasia, Singapur, Brunei, Corea del Sur, Corea del Norte, Japón, China, Taiwán, Hong Kong, Macao, Vietnam, Laos, Camboya, Myanmar, Filipinas, Malasia, Singapur, Brunei, Corea del Sur, Corea del Norte, Japón, China, Taiwán, Hong Kong, Macao.

In April 2014, CCC in association with the University Central, conducted a training workshop related to cetaceans and whale watching to more than 40 tourist operators of Caleta Chanaral de Aceituno, a small fishermen town located in northern Chile where blue whales are also sighted during summer months. The workshop was part of a broader project to position Chanaral as a high quality tourist destination in Chile.

Save Mar Brava Campaign



In February 2014, we participated with other representatives of civil society organizations, tourist operators, artisan fishermen, farmers and indigenous communities, in a press conference with the congresswoman Jenny Alvarez and municipal council from Ancud Rodolfo Norambuena to launch the campaign “Salvemos Mar Brava” (Save Mar Brava). During the press conference, the participants expressed its disapproval of the participation process conducted under the Environmental Impact Assessment related to the mega wind farm project and opposed to the magnitude and location of this project in a highly sensitive area.

Later in June 2014, we attended a presentation of Salvemos Mar Brava to the Environmental Commission of the Chilean Senate in order to raise awareness about the negative impacts of the proposed wind farm project in northwestern Chiloé and raise their support to generate guidelines for the development of renewable energies in Chile that ensure the conservation of the natural patrimony.

International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee



Barbara Galletti, president of Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, participated as delegate from the Government of Chile in the Scientific Committee meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in May in Bled, Slovenia.

As part of her work, she presented two working papers related to blue whales and the Alfaguara Project. One reported on the advances of the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalogue (SHBWC) and the other on preliminary results of abundance estimates of blue whales from mark-recapture techniques using data from 2004 to 2012 that should be published in 2015. As a result the Scientific Committee of the IWC welcomed the scientific value of the Alfaguara project for the understanding of the blue whale population present in Chilean waters and looked forward for final results.

The SHBWC represents a collaborative effort that facilitates inter-regional comparisons between blue whale researchers from Australia, Antarctica, South East Pacific and Eastern Tropical Pacific, and the Committee noting the value of the SHBWC, recommended its continuation.

Financial Statement

This statement considers the financial period for the Alfaguara Project Field season, January to April 2014.

A rate of exchange of 535 chilean pesos per US dollar is used for all conversions in the current statement.

Expenses	Total US\$	Incomes	Total US\$
Terrestrial/Maritime Transport	9,596	Pacific Whale Foundation	14,789
Meals/Accommodation	5,534		
Communications	1,578	Global Greengrants Fund	12,816
Others	2,486		
<i>Subtotal operational costs</i>	19,193		
<i>Subtotal personnel</i>	8,411		
Total	27,605	Total	27,605