

THE 411 ON THE IWC



As part of our core advocacy work on behalf of whales, Pacific Whale Foundation is actively involved in the proceedings of the International Whaling Commission, commonly known as the IWC. At its inception in 1946, the IWC was essentially a league of whaling nations – established to promote “the orderly development of the whaling industry” and concerned mainly with setting standards and

specifications for whaling: what whales could be killed, where, when, how and how many. Today, however, its annual meetings gather roughly 200 scientists from 40 countries to present their research and recommendations for whale conservation and management policies.

Senior Research Biologist Stephanie Stack attended this year’s meeting in Bled, Slovenia as a Pacific Whale Foundation representative, and shares her experience with us here.

How did PWF get involved in these annual IWC meetings?

Greg (Kaufman) attended the IWC early in his career as the delegate from Tonga and later as an Invited Participant (i.e. independent researcher, not representing a member country), helping to create its “Five Year Global Plan for Whale-watching” and digital Whale Watching Handbook, out later this year. It was important for Greg to see whale-watching developed in a sustainable manner, and his involvement with the WW subcommittee was largely aimed at developing principles and guidelines for whalewatching which will help guide the development of whalewatching regulations around the world.

What were some of PWF’s contributions and takeaways from the 2018 meeting?

Pacific Whale Foundation engaged in international program progress reports, which were discussed in terms of managing and conserving whales worldwide. Participating in this exchange really helps us to identify areas where data may be lacking and to identify trends that need more research. Our work using whalewatching boats as a platform for research was very well received at the IWC, and the whalewatching subcommittee in particular has recognized that PWF were pioneers of this type of research. We were encouraged to develop standardized methods for opportunistic data collection so that researchers can compare data sets across different regions.

Regarding photo identification research, I realized that we are ahead of the curve with our photo-ID methodologies, and was able to share suggestions and advice with a number of other researchers. People were very impressed that we have gone completely digital with our field data collection and we discussed the pros and cons of various apps for data collection. Whale & Dolphin Tracker (our free mobile app) was extremely well received. I was also able to speak with some researchers who are starting to use UAVs/ drones for their work, and as we are doing the same here we spent some time comparing equipment and analytical methods – this was very helpful and timely. In general, building relationships with collaborators at this level is highly important for our work and will benefit PWF in the long-run.

Overall, my time in Slovenia allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the role PWF has played on this international level, and I look forward to refining our research direction with this newfound knowledge and guidance.

NEW PUBLICATION ON MOTHER-CALF HUMPBACKS ON MAUI



Among humpback whales, mothers with calves are a particularly special group, especially in terms of conservation. Whale calves represent the next generation of an increasing population of humpback whales that will need our continued monitoring and stewardship. To study where they spend their time while here on Maui, our Research department analyzed data collected

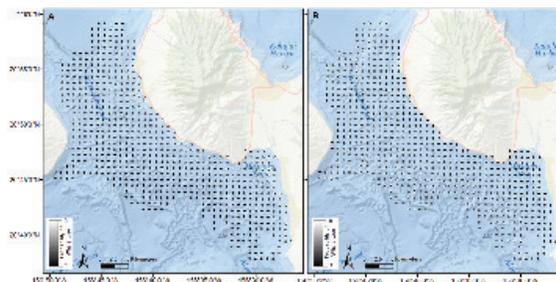
by marine naturalists working aboard PacWhale Eco-Adventures using the Whale & Dolphin Tracker app.

From 2013 – 2017, naturalists used the app to record location and group information about humpback whales they encountered. This approach allowed the researchers to collect data more often and over a much larger area than possible with a single research vessel.

From these sightings, the Research team found that pods of whales that contained calves prefer shallower waters than pods without calves. Pods with calves were also more likely to be seen farther south within the study area, implying that they show a more specific preference for waters near Ma’alaea Bay and South Maui compared to similarly shallow areas in the ‘Au’au Channel.

Other scientists have reported humpback whale mother-calf pods showing preferences for shallow, protected areas in regions such as Brazil, Madagascar and the Dominican Republic, but our researchers were the first to conduct a long-term study across the Maui four-island region. The North Pacific population of humpback whales is growing, so it’s important to know how these whales are using their habitats in order to effectively manage human activities.

Darker dots represent higher chance of sightings of pods without (left) and with a calf (right).



Study results at scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?paperID=83808
Also available on our website: pacificwhale.org/research/publications
[first paper under 2nd menu option: referred scientific articles]