

NEWSLETTER OF THE PUGET SOUND CHAPTER
OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 43

FALL 2009

Next Meeting:

Wednesday November 18

Please join us for Robert L. Pitman—
*The Family That Preys Together: Foraging
Behavior, Prey Specialization and Prey
Handling by Pack-ice Killer Whales
(Orcinus sp. Type B) in Antarctic Waters...*
Come and connect with your fellow
ACS/PS members.

For more info. see: [http://
www.acspugetsound.org/speakers/](http://www.acspugetsound.org/speakers/).

Event Information

All speaker series events meet on the
3rd Wednesday of the month at the
Phinney Neighborhood Center,
Room 6, 6532 Phinney Ave. N.,
Seattle, (just north of the Woodland
Park Zoo).

Doors open at 7 PM and the program
starts at 7:30 PM. Plenty of free park-
ing is available in the upper and lower
parking lots. Admission is free—
donations to offset the room rental
costs are gratefully appreciated of
course as we operate on a shoestring
like almost all nonprofits.

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Chapter Currents

by Uko Gorter, ACS/PS President

Did you enjoy your September “Spyhopper” and the special full color beaked whale issue of “Whalewatcher” dedicated to John Heyning? You may have already noticed it by the increase in the publications coming from ACS National; our organization continues to make huge strides to improve our ability to fulfill our mission to educate the public about cetaceans and the issues they face.

In her one-year tenure, our ACS administrator Kaye Reznick, has diligently worked on bringing us these valued publications, updated our membership database, and organized our ACS headquarters in San Pedro, California.

Now, to take our organization even further and guide it through a new exciting era, I’m pleased to let you know that we have an Executive Director. Cheryl McCormick brings with her a wealth of experience in the non-profit and fund-raising world. Most recently she was Director of Conservation for the Santa Lucia Conservancy, where she oversaw ecological research, natural resource management, conservation initiatives and citizen science initiatives for the Santa Lucia Preserve in Carmel, CA. As an indication of her drive, dedication, and stamina, this summer Cheryl completed an exhausting 100 mile Run for the Wildlands to raise awareness and funds for the plight of this beautiful preserve. Cheryl is a plant ecologist with over 15 years of experience working in all aspects of invasive species biology in upstate New York, Georgia, Florida, the Greater Caribbean Basin and California. She obtained a B.A. in Environmental Science with minors in Biology and Chemistry from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh, her M.A. in Geography/GIS, and a Ph.D. in Ecology from The University of Georgia. While Cheryl may not possess a background in all things cetology, it is clear she has a keen interest in the environment and conservation issues. Cheryl was involved with ACS-Monterey Bay Chapter, loves whales, and lists Whale Rider as one of her many favorite movies. Please join me in extending a warm welcome to Cheryl! We look forward to working with her.

This issue of the Whulj has a number of articles on local news such as social networking, ACS/PS members at the Society of Marine Mammology conference in Quebec, a pertinent film review, upcoming speaker series topics, and also news on our beloved SRKW’s. Enjoy!



ACS/PS Grant Recipient, Teresa Mongillo, wins in Quebec!

by Candice Emmons and Uko Gorter

Congratulations Teresa!

ACS/PS would like to congratulate our last year's research grant recipient, Teresa Mongillo, for winning the best pre-doctoral student poster presentation award at the 18th Biennial Conference on the biology of Marine Mammals, sponsored by the Society of Marine Mammalogy in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

Over 800 research posters were featured at this October conference.

Teresa Mongillo's poster was titled: "Estimated polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE) accumulation in the Southern Resident killer whale (*Orcinus orca*): Sex and age no longer matter."

We also had at least three ACS/PS board members with research posters at the biennial.

- The poster by Candi (Emmons et al.) ...with surely one of the longest titles: "Assessing seasonal distribution, movements, and habitat use of the Southern Resident killer whales in the coastal waters of Washington State using remote autonomous acoustic recorders."
- Stephanie Norman (Goertz et al.): "Field Sampling of Free-Ranging Beluga Whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*) For Health Assessment."
- Uko Gorter as illustrator/ co-author in (Sekiguchi et al.): "Additional information on the ecology of spectacled porpoises (*Phocoena dioptrica*) in Antarctic waters."

If you are planning attending the 19th biennial in 2011, be sure to let us know then so we can connect!



Attention Facebook users! Our chapter now has a facebook group. Here you can find links to our web site, news about the chapter, and information on our upcoming events. This is also a great place for members to connect, post questions, and discuss issues in an informal setting. Hope to see you there! <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=169166461742&v=wall&ref=search#>

Whulj "the saltwater we know"

The Newsletter of
the Puget Sound Chapter
of the American Cetacean Society



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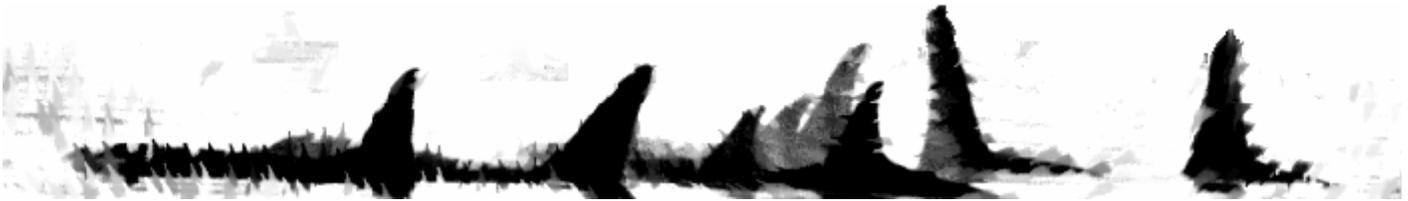
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submissions, comments, suggestions, and questions welcomed



“Saving Luna:” A Must-See Film

Review by Bonnie Gretz

Photos courtesy Suzanne Chisholm, Mountainside Films, Ltd. © All Rights Reserved

On September 10th, I joined more than 200 other whale-centric folks at the San Juan Community Theater in Friday Harbor to see the film “Saving Luna,” written and directed by Suzanne Chisholm and Michael Parfit and produced by Mountainside Films in association with CBC Newsworld.

A reception and the film showing were organized in Friday Harbor to benefit the Soundwatch Program of the Whale Museum. This was the first showing of “Saving Luna” in the United States, though it has been shown all over the world, winning numerous prestigious film awards. It was heartening to see such a large group come together to support (\$5,500 was raised!) this very important part of the Whale Museum’s efforts to protect the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales, and very interesting to meet and talk with Michael and Suzanne before seeing the movie. Also it was great fun to catch up with my Puget Sound friends!

I’m sure most of our members will recall Luna’s story—the young Southern Resident L-pod whale who somehow wound up in British Columbia’s Nootka Sound in 2001, and despite dedicated human effort to help him, was tragically killed in 2006 by a tugboat.

This movie will make you laugh, cry, be awe-struck by the beauty of Nootka Sound, be amazed by the commitment



and love of the people involved in trying to help Luna, and be amazed in a quite different way at the politics and hubris of the people who seemingly put their own interests before Luna’s well-being. There are legitimate differences of opinion about exactly what Luna’s well-being actually was, and the film does an excellent job of showing all sides of the intense debates.

But I think the real amazement will be that Luna himself broke through the species barrier, as Mike and Suzanne talked about during a panel discussion following the film. Whatever you may think about inter-species communication and friendship, this film will make you re-think your notions. Luna made it very clear that he needed and wanted friendship and interaction, perhaps not a big surprise given that killer whales typically live in very close family pods. And when he was with the humans who gave him friendship—some of the First Nations people, residents of Nootka Sound, loggers on the booms, and ultimately, Michael and Suzanne—he stayed out of the “trouble” of interfering with boats and even sea planes.

Michael and Suzanne originally went to Nootka Sound in 2004 to evaluate and write the story for the Smithsonian Institution. But as Michael explains in the film, the story kept changing—changed by Luna himself. They resist the

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“Saving Luna:”— continued from page 3

urge to assign human qualities and rationale to Luna’s actions, and focus on the often unexplainable efforts of humans to cope with both an animal in trouble and in the eyes of some, a danger and nuisance to many.

But as Michael and Suzanne became more involved in the story, and spent more time with this out-going little whale, it is inevitable that they were pulled beyond just recording an intriguing story. Michael broke an order imposed by Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and moved beyond his own scientific and journalistic guidelines—he made eye contact with Luna, and then touched him.

The barrier was breached—a friendship and bond between the consciousness of a wild creature and a human was formed—Michael calls it “a friendship deeper than we know,” and built over the next months. Michael and Suzanne don’t try to explain the mystery, nor do they over-sentimentalize Luna’s dilemma and ultimate sad fate. But

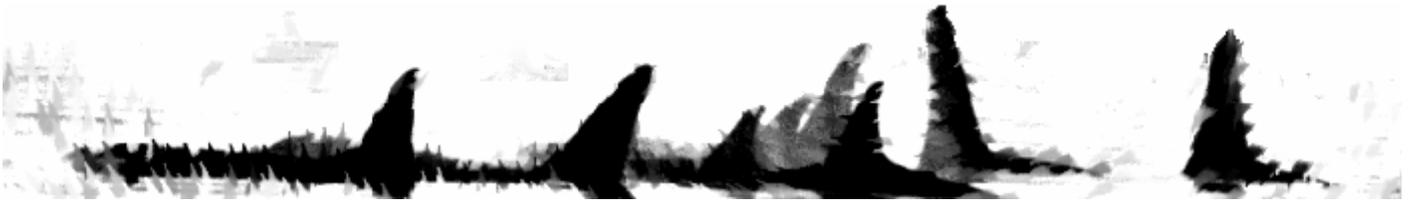
they do ask the viewer to consider the deep connections between species, and to consider what “friendship” may really mean.

This movie shows the best of human nature, and some of the worst, and yet leaves you with a feeling that if we could just open our hearts to the fellow creatures we share our planet with, “all creatures great and small,” including ourselves, will be much better off.

When this lovely and thought provoking film reaches a theater near you, do not miss the opportunity to have your heart and mind opened up. As the movie poster so eloquently states, “A life does not have to be human to be great.”

To find out where you can see the film, go to www.SavingLuna.com.





Seal Sitting—on Beach Patrol in Seattle

story by Brenda Peterson, photo by Robin Lindsey

reprinted from the Sept/Oct issue of *Wildlife Conservation* by permission of the authors

“Come quick,” crackles Robin’s voice over my cell phone. “A seal pup is in trouble.” Every year, from spring to September, mother harbor seals park their pups on the Salish Sea beaches in the Pacific Northwest. That is also when my neighbors gather for what we call “seal sitting”—keeping vigil over the vulnerable pup while the mother is far out to sea fishing.

We volunteers sit together, watching from a respectful distance, binoculars trained on the pup’s every move, scanning for bullet holes, orca bites, or behavioral signs of internal injuries or distress. In 4- to 6-hour shifts for up to 48 hours, we politely keep people and dogs 100 yards away from the seal pup, as recommended by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA). We explain seal conservation to beachcombers and invite them to join us.

Most Seattle city beaches—as along so many coastlines around the world—are lined by concrete sea walls. Ours is a natural beach, one of the few haul-out sites left in the city where harbor seals can give birth, rest, molt their silver-gray spotted coat, and spend time in community with one another. The seal’s speckled fur is camouflage against rocky beaches. I’ve watched joggers and clam diggers pass unaware within ten feet of a resting seal.

But the seal on shore notices everything: The hoarse caw and the flap of a great blue heron lifting on dinosaur-bird wings, the laughing of schoolchildren at the bus stop, the digging of people for razor clams, the spiraling down into the surf of a fierce osprey hungry for fish, even the hip-hopping down the beach of a young girl tuned into her iPod.

“Is the pup plump?” I ask Robin, to check for the first sign of a healthy seal. “How’s his breathing?”

“He’s very plump, probably still nursing,” Robin shouts over the din of boat traffic and a dock that is teeming with tourists boarding the Elliot Bay Water Taxi. “I’d say he’s about two feet and maybe twenty pounds. Adorable . . . But he’s panting heavily and very agitated.”

Robin is calling in her seal alert from Seacrest Park, Seattle’s most popular dive site and a very crowded public beach a few miles farther north in our Alki Beach

neighborhood. It is not the best beach for seal napping. Perhaps the animal is not there to rest, but to die.

“You know, I think our pup is foaming at the mouth,” Robin adds. “Bad sign, right?”

I grab my tide chart, binoculars, rain slicker, water bottle, and a sandwich—it might be a long stay. “I’ll call some other seal sitters,” I say, before speed-dialing more volunteers.

Fortunately, Seacrest is across the street from a contingent of seal sitters who call themselves the “Condo Brigade.” While working from home offices, these volunteers help keep close watch from their windows via telescopes trained on the seal pups. They also dispatch and send out email alerts to other seal sitters.

Our neighborhood group was trained by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA). We work closely with the Seattle Parks Department, which promptly responds to a newborn seal on the beach by cordoning off the animal with red cones and yellow “Marine Mammal Protected” tape. They also post signs with seal conservation guidelines.

Federal law prohibits touching, feeding, or disturbing harbor seals. Dogs and too much human commotion are the biggest dangers for seals on their haul-out beaches. Still, many well-meaning beachcombers mistake a resting pup for an abandoned one. Improper human attention or curiosity can do more to harass than help. If the mother seal returns to find her pup surrounded by people, she may truly abandon it. “Okay,” Robin shouts over her cell phone, as a foghorn blasts from a Seattle-bound ferryboat. “I’ll get you some photos to send to NOAA.”

“Watch to see if the pup’s breathing steadies or if he has any discharge from his nose and mouth,” I tell her.

This year, we’ve lost several pups to a respiratory virus called lungworm, or pneumonia. Robin’s photo documentation will be invaluable not only for evaluating and tracking the pup’s health, but also to help NOAA monitor disease and injury among the seal population. NOAA advises that if a pup has been unattended for 48 hours or is clearly

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Seal Sitting—continued from page 5

in distress, people should contact the local Marine Mammal Stranding Network for help.

When I call Kristin Wilkinson, NOAA's full-time marine mammal stranding specialist for the Northwest, she responds promptly. "Their veins are close to the surface of the skin in the fore and hind flippers, allowing the seals to regulate their overall body temperature. Seals haul out daily to rest, interact with other seals, and thermoregulate," Kristin reminds me, at once affable and informative.

"Seals do not have the ability to produce sweat like we do, so this is their way of cooling down. Watch to see if the animal raises his front or hind flippers to cool off."

"So you think we may have a healthy seal?" I ask.

"Well, time will tell as you keep watch. It's a good sign that there is no discharge from the seal's nostrils or mouth. Washington State has a healthy seal population . . . But you know, fifty percent of harbor seal pups do not

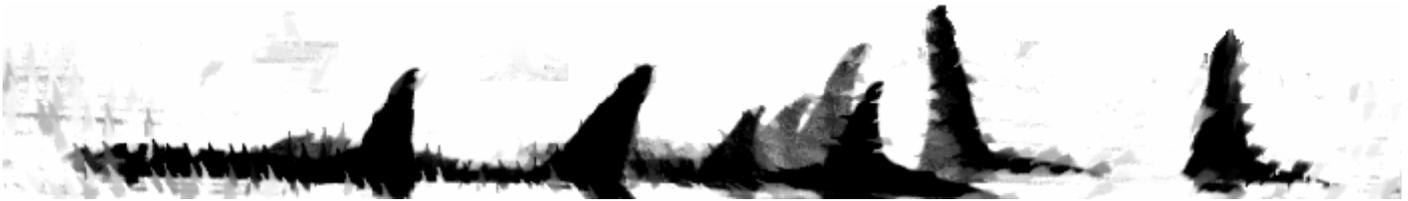
(Continued on page 7)



Seal Pups and Seattle Skyline.

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<http://www.robinlindseyphotography.com/>



Seal Sitting—continued from page 6

survive their first year. It's rough out there." Kristin adds a reassuring, "Every beach needs neighborhood volunteers like your group. Keep me posted."

When I reach the wharf at Seacrest, Robin, Janette, Jane, Diane, and Nancy are outside the barrier tape, sharing their binoculars and NOAA seal conservation flyers with passersby. Joggers, walkers, and picnickers are all rapt, watching the pup stretch and yawn, his baby teeth clearly visible.

"Good news," Jane reports. "No more foaming at the mouth. No obvious signs of injury. We think the pup is settled in waiting for mom."

We seal sitters settle in, too. The Seattle sun—never very dependable—burns through the violet-gray mists. In the sunlight, the pup folds his fore-flippers around his blubbery chest and lets out a contented snuffle. Then he lies on his back, revealing a nicely healed umbilical on his blazing white, speckled belly. Newborns are too little to fear people or predators. After being weaned at four to six weeks they become more wary. But for the first few weeks, seal sitters can help prevent injury and ensure the pups enjoy the deep rest they need to thrive.

"I think of these pups as my grand-seals," says Diane. She and her husband, Carl, just moved here from Maui to be near her grandchildren. Now, she sits on the beach with them, offering "daycare" for seal pups and teaching a new generation about sharing our shores with seals.

A rumbling garbage truck startles the pup from his slumber. He raises his head, glances around, wide-eyed. One of the seal sitters sings a soft lullaby, which elicits a sigh and a quick return to sleep.

"He looks just like an aquatic puppy," Nancy remarks fondly. She is a schoolteacher.

Nancy adds that when her next-door neighbor Susan watched from her living room as a seal pup struggled vainly to climb atop driftwood floating in the waves, "It broke my heart that that pup never found a place to rest." So she asked her husband to build a six-foot by six-foot floating platform for the seals off their private beach. Now, seal mothers come to nurse their pups, and the pups nap without threat of predators on this "life raft."

We all watched a pup we named Sunny lie on that platform for days, bleeding from a boat propeller gash on its neck. We thought we would lose the pup, but a week of sun healed it. Susan also witnessed on this float what few people, even marine biologists, ever see: the birth of a seal pup.

Meanwhile, on Seacrest Park beach, our newborn seems comfortable enough within our respectful circle to descend into a deep sleep for eight hours. By sunset, the tide has risen very near the seal's whiskers. As the surf begins to lap him awake, we hope his mother will return soon and call him back to sea.

"There she is!" At last, the exultant cry goes up from a seal sitter.

Sure enough, a sleek seal head pirouettes in the surf. She gives a soft cooing call, and instantly our pup is alert, tiny fore-flippers flopping as he scoots and hops down the beach and into the waves. Soon, there are two heads bobbing in the water, looking back at shore. A cheer rises from the crowd, and the children wave wildly as the mother and pup swim away. A day at the beach will never be the same for many of them.

Anyone along our coasts can volunteer to become "citizen naturalists," as I like to think of our seal sitters. It only takes a phone tree or an Internet contact list. If a seal is injured, it's easy to link with a local NOAA or stranding network. Sea creatures can use all the vigilance and care we can give. We seal sitters hope that as long as we keep vigil, the harbor seals will stay healthy and thrive. They will not go the way of so many other species—not on our watch.

*Brenda Peterson is the author of 15 books, including *Sightings: The Gray Whale's Mysterious Journey* (with Linda Hogan, *National Geographic*, 2002). For more information about seal conservation, visit www.sealsitters.org.*

It is with mixed emotions of relief and regret that I bid you farewell as the editor of the *Whulj*. I will continue to serve ACS as webmaster for both the ACS/PS and ACS National web sites, but it is time to give others the opportunity to lay out the *Whulj*. Thank You to all the contributors over the years. You have made this newsletter an interesting, quality publication.

— Diane Allen



November 18 ACS/PS talk

Robert L. Pitman — “The Family That Preys Together... in Antarctic Waters”

There have been relatively few reports of feeding or foraging among the three known ecotypes of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in Antarctic waters, including Type B (pack-ice killer whale - PIKW), a purported prey specialist on ice seals.

During 13-30 January 2009, we followed 3 separate groups of PIKW (4, 7 and 10 animals, respectively), for a total of 93.0 hrs off the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, and recorded observations on their prey and foraging habits.

Observed kills included 15 seals and the first confirmed kill of an Antarctic minke whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*) by this ecotype. PIKW groups spread out when foraging in fields of loose pack-ice and spy-hopped around individual floes looking for resting seals.

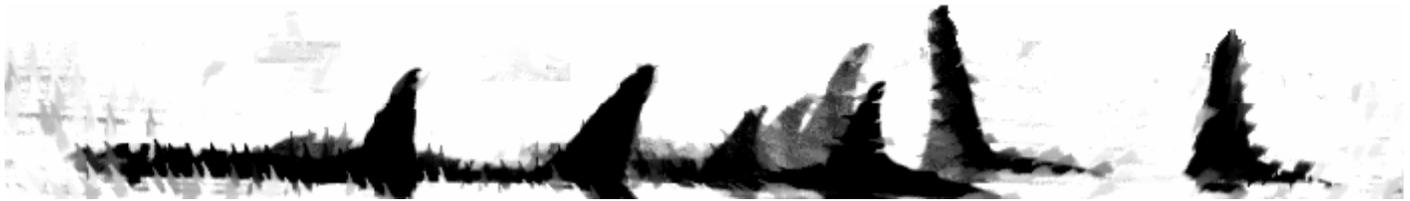
Nearly all of the seal kills (12/15) were taken by a cooperative wave-washing technique with from 2 to 7 PIKW swimming abreast and creating a wave to break up larger floes and to wash individual seals off smaller floes; 3 additional free-swimming seals were taken in open water.

We provide new details of wave-wash foraging behavior based on attacks on 22 individual seals where PIKW produced 122 individual waves. For more:

<http://www.acspugetsound.org/speakers/index.html>



L-POD BABY — This photo was taken on Saturday, October 10, 2009. L-pod was heading south toward Admiralty Inlet and was just north of Point Wilson when we encountered them. They were moving slow and appeared to be in a resting pattern. We were very excited on our first glimpses of the calf. I was confident that the calf was too small to be the one born earlier in the year or late last year. L113 was traveling very closely on the right side of L94 (Calypso) and L41 Mega was just behind and on the left side of L94. Photo and caption courtesy Jami Nagel, Naturalist/Photographer Island Adventure Cruises www.northwestwhalephotography.com © 2009, All Rights Reserved



Vashon Hydrophone Project (VHP) Update: VHP Records First Huge Superpod!

by Ann Stateler, VHP Coordinator

The VHP's Southern Resident orca season started with aplomb on October 11, when J, K, and L Pods surprised us with a superpod in Colvos Pass! The SRKW's arrived much earlier than last year, when they did not visit Vashon-Maury waters until December 2.

On October 11, the VHP recorded an opulent diversity of calls used by all three SRKW pods. The abundant echolocation clicks and buzzes, in addition to observed behavior, indicated that the orcas were foraging as well as socializing. As the vocalizations grew louder, waves of *Kéet guchi* (killer whale dorsal fins) rolled north through Colvos Pass in a sumptuous procession reminiscent of a powwow Grand Entry. Gregarious orcas were breaching, cartwheeling, and slapping their pec flippers and tail flukes profusely.

Based on acoustic evidence, visual IDs, observed behavior, and our count of individuals - particularly males - we consider it possible that the entire SRKW community paraded by the VHP site. Including newborn L113, the population is now 86 orcas. We have not witnessed a superpod of this size in Colvos Pass in more than five years. The VHP installed the hydrophone in 2004, so this was our first opportunity to record such an event.

I conferred with other researchers and compared the VHP

recording with superpods recorded in the San Juans: a shout out to Scott Veirs of Beam Reach and Orcasound.net, who has been quite helpful. Regrettably, Mark Sears and other researchers who normally take ID photos were out of town, so substantial photographic data on the superpod is lacking.

To our dismay, dozens of vessels hounded the whales in Colvos Pass. Some brazenly violated the MMPA guidelines. We witnessed a near-collision between a male orca and a small open boat, and promptly reported it to NOAA enforcement at 1-800-853-1964. Later we saw the Coast Guard stopping boats as the killer whales traveled by Blake Island.

We had another encounter with the SRKW in East Passage on October 22, when Mark Sears obtained samples of fish scales and intestines, as well as splendid photos, such as the picture of Gaia (L78) accompanying my article.

In August and September, Transients T36A, T36A1, T137, T137A, and T137B visited Vashon-Maury waters between their seal-hunting forays deep into southern Puget Sound. Female T36A is tagged; follow her travels at <http://cascadiaresearch.org/robin/kwseptember09.htm>.



"Gaia" (L78), Tsu'xiit/Luna's uncle, swims by the Space Needle. Photo © Mark Sears, 10/22/09.

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The Family That Preys Together: Foraging Behavior, Prey Specialization and Prey Handling by Pack-ice Killer Whales ... (Orcinus sp. Type B) in Antarctic Waters - 7 PM at the Phinney Neighborhood Center, Room 6 (just north of Woodland Park Zoo)



Photo of A73 (Springer) courtesy Mark Sears © 2002 All Rights Reserved

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