

NEWSLETTER OF THE PUGET SOUND CHAPTER
OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2

SPRING 2005

Next Meeting: Wed. May 18

Dr. Patricia Weyer

Sacred Vessels and the "Vesica Piscis"
the Cosmic Story of the
Human-Dolphin Relationship
see acspugetsound.org for details
(including links to photos of
Pat's beautiful graal glass vessels)

Chapter Currents

by Uko Gorter, ACS/PS President

With the arrival of spring we always welcome the gray whales. There have been numerous sightings around the Puget Sound area lately, particularly near Whidbey Island. Unfortunately there have also been three strandings. One juvenile washed up on Whidbey Island on April 18, a second stranding occurred on the outer coast on April 26, and a 3rd near Bremerton Naval Yard as we go to press. Hopefully, this will not develop into a worrisome trend as happened in 1999/2000. Necropsy on the first two whales was performed by Cascadia Research of Olympia.

In this issue of theWhulj, we are pleased to introduce you to two new journalists—Barbara Bennett and Bonnie Gretz

Barbara is an ACS board member at-large, who will report on cetacean issues from Alaska on a regular basis. In this, her first article for Whulj, Barbara introduces herself and writes with great humor about her first experiences of whales and life in Alaska.

We are also thrilled to have a contribution from Bonnie Gretz, past conservation chair on the board of ACS National. Bonnie arranged an exclusive interview for ACS/PS with Erich Hoyt regarding the trapped orcas in Japan. It is a compelling account of this tragic event.

ACS/PS would like to thank Fred West, who stepped down from our board, for his enthusiasm and longtime support for our organization! He is a great pod'ner.

**Report on
River Dolphins
from Bangladesh**

by Benazir Ahmed, 2004 Grant Recipient and
Stephanie Norman, ACS/PS Grants Chair

One of the recipients of our \$500 grants in 2004 was Professor Benazir Ahmed from the Department of Zoology at the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh. Professor Ahmed's proposed research project was to assess the feasibility of establishing a protected area for the river dolphin Shushuk (*Platanista gangetica*) in the Sangu River, southeast of Bangladesh.

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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 7pm and the program starts at 7:30pm. Plenty of free parking is available in the upper and lower parking lots. Admission is free—donations to offset the room rental costs are gratefully appreciated of course, we operate on a shoestring, but we want you to come freely.

Meanwhile, the transient killer whales in Hood Canal do not seem to show any signs of moving on. The six orcas entered the canal more than 13 weeks ago. Will there be any harbor seals left?

We are excited to welcome Candice Emmons on our board as our new chapter Secretary. Candi, as she is known by those who know her, was a senior research assistant for the Center for Whale Research with Ken Balcomb, for eight years. She is currently working on her masters degree in Marine Affairs at the University of Washington. We wish her luck with her thesis "*Southern Resident Killer Whales, A Case Study for Defining Distinct Population Segments (DPS) under the Endangered Species Act*". While Candi is new to the ACS/PS board, she is not new to ACS. Past participation includes involvement with the annual ACS/LA gray whale census. We are thrilled to have her wonderful personality and expertise on-board. Welcome Candi!

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A New Pair of Glasses

by Barbara Bennett

When I moved to Alaska nine years ago I didn't know what to expect. I had barely looked it up on the map. I only knew that it was very far away from LA and it would take me from the ocean and the whales that I had learned to love. My new home would be in Anchorage on the side of a mountain that overlooks the Cook Inlet. It wasn't a place for whales. A friend once told me that when I travel to a new place to "put on a new pair of glasses." But as I looked out over the muddy water, I doubted that the whales would ever come here.

The Cook Inlet is located along the west side of the Kenai Peninsula in South-central Alaska. It is salt water but at its northern terminus the inlet is dark and murky, heavily laden with glacial silt and subject to extreme tides. It wasn't a place that I expected to see whales until one day in July when a gray whale washed up on the beach at the mouth of the Placer River. The Placer River flows into the Cook Inlet along the Seward Highway about 40 miles east of Anchorage. When that whale turned up I learned that whales had been there all along and that the experiences I would have with them would happen in the most extraordinary ways.

Alaska has 33,904 miles of shoreline – twice the length of the Lower 48. Eighteen species of cetaceans swim in the oceans along its borders. Among them are the great whales; the bowhead and northern Pacific right whale along with blue, fin, sei, humpback, Minke, and the gray whale.

I had come to think of the gray whale as "my" whale. It was the whale that I had learned about working as a boat naturalist during whale watching season in LA. I had received my training from the LA Chapter of ACS. Each week from December through March, I could go out and watch these whales as they made their way north and south along the Pacific coastline. Their winter destination is the birthing lagoons in Baja California but in the summer months they feed in the shallow waters of the Bering and Chukchi Seas along the west coast of Alaska. From March until well into the summer, gray whales swim past Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska near the mouth of the Cook Inlet and as I was to learn, occasionally one swims up as far north as Anchorage.

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Orca Sing

will be the weekend of Fathers' Day as that is closest to the Summer Solstice. Maybe we will see you at Lime Kiln Park on Saturday, June 18th (San Juan Island).

Thank You to SOS Printing in Port Townsend, an EnviroStar printer—www.sosprinting.biz— for both great service and the nonprofit discount !

Whulj
"the saltwater we know"

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



P.O. Box 17136
Seattle, WA 98127-0836
206-781-4860
info@acspugetsound.org

ACS/PS Board

OFFICERS:

President -

Uko Gorter,
uko.susan@verizon.net

Vice President -

Ann Stateler,
reletats@aol.com

Treasurer -

Joe Olson,
joe@acspugetsound.org

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Candice Emmons,
cemmons@u.washington.edu

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Fundraising:

Darcie Larson,
darcielarson@yahoo.com

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Joe Olson,
joe@acspugetsound.org

Grants:

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whaledoc@flash.net

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uko.susan@verizon.net

Past President:

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joe@acspugetsound.org

Technology:

Joe Olson,
joe@acspugetsound.org

HELP WANTED—Reporter to assist with content for both web site and newsletter—volunteer position only — compile and compose reports on chapter activities, member profiles, chapter research grant giving (past and present), educational outreach, and topics of own. Must be self motivated. Interested parties, please email the editor.

ACS/PS Scientific Advisors

Dr. David Bain, Dr. Robin Baird, John Calambokidis,
Dr. Marilyn Dahlheim, Dr. John Ford, Dr. Richard Osborne,
Dr. Adam Pack, and Dr. Peter Ross

Whulj publication schedule: February, May, August, November
Editor - Diane Allen, diane@artemisComputing.com - 360-437-1303
46 Village Way, ste 171, Port Ludlow WA 98365



Japanese Orca Pod Tragedy

*An interview with Erich Hoyt, author and
Senior Research Fellow at the Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society,
by Bonnie Gretz*

In early February of 2005, a pod of orca were trapped in the ice pack off the Shiretoko peninsula, northeast Hokkaido, in far northern Japan. Unfortunately, 11 or 12 died in the incident, including 3 calves. Erich Hoyt, co-director of the Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society's Far East Russia Orca Project, has graciously agreed to answer questions about this incident for *Whulj*.

Bonnie: Erich, thank you so much for agreeing to give our ACS/Puget Sound *Whulj* readers some information about this tragic incident in Japan. First, please describe the circumstances the whales found themselves in when this came to the attention of Kotoe Sasamori, who is a naturalist with the Volcano Bay Marine Animals Watching Association In Muroran, Hokkaido:

Erich: Shortly after the orcas got caught in the ice, the whale watch naturalist Kotoe Sasamori received a phone call from a Hokkaido TV station who asked if she would go with them by helicopter to investigate the event and tell what happened. The town was trying to help get the whales out of the ice but the conditions were very difficult. From her base in Rausu, she was able to visit the scene of the stranding several times and to report on it to Japanese TV. But some whales had already died and the others died very quickly. Only one was seen leaving the area, having escaped the ice, though probably weakened from the event.

Bonnie: Why do you think they were in the ice pack? Is this normal behavior for orcas in this area? Were they hunting?

Erich: Orcas are often seen in this area during the mid to late winter months. Yet no one had ever heard of them being caught in the ice. They are thought to have been hunting seals. Several of the whales had seal remains in their stomachs. But why did they get caught this time? No one knows for sure. Some say the ice was moving very fast, but orcas also are fast and familiar with ice in this part of the world.

Bonnie: In the article on the WDCS website, Ms. Sasamori indicated that one or more of the calves might have been ill. Do you have more information on this?

Erich: There was some evidence that one or more of the calves might have been ill or deformed but we won't have details until the full necropsies are published hopefully later this year. The important thing, I think, is that these were young calves and were probably still under the close care of their mothers and the group as a whole. Preliminary analysis of PCBs and other

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Summit for Salmon 2005 Helping to restore the favorite food of J, K, and L-pods

by Darcie Larson

Last summer, ACS/Puget Sound Chapter board member Peggy Foreman literally climbed a mountain to help restore the favorite prey of the Southern Resident orcas, wild salmon. Peggy took part in the first annual Summit for Salmon benefit climb of Mt. Rainier, and raised \$2,000 for the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition. This Seattle-based non-profit organization works to bring back abundant wild salmon and steelhead to the Columbia Basin through removal of the four lower Snake River dams. This July, another dedicated team of 31 salmon advocates is taking on the dual challenges of raising at least \$2,000 each and climbing to the 14,410-foot summit of Rainier.

Recently the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife identified the dramatic reduction in Columbia Basin salmon as the most significant change in prey availability for the Southern Resident orcas. Together, Save Our Wild Salmon and the Summit for Salmon team are working to resurrect what was once the most productive salmon run on earth. You can learn more and support a Summit for Salmon climber by going to www.wildsalmon.org/summit.cfm.

VHP Update: Mark Sears Makes a Splash with "Whales of Vashon"

by Ann Stateler, ACS/PS Vice President & VHP Coordinator

Many thanks to the 85 people who turned out for "Whales of Vashon" with Mark Sears at the Vashon Theatre on April 17. We are especially grateful to Eileen Wolcott and her staff for offering the Theatre as a fundraising venue for the Vashon Hydrophone Project (VHP). The event generated \$400 for the VHP.

Maya Sears was indispensable in organizing Mark's presentation. Marty Schafer did an outstanding job of converting Mark's slides so they could be used in PowerPoint. ACS/PS resident Tlingit artist Odin Lonning created a beautiful "thank you" art piece for Eileen and the Vashon Theatre. He also helped format and distribute event posters.

We were thrilled that some people came to "Whales of Vashon" from Seattle and Tacoma. We were honored to have Kathy Fletcher of People for Puget Sound and Donna Sandstrom of Orca Alliance in attendance.

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A New Pair of Glasses

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When I first heard about the whale, it was through an article in the newspaper. It was described as a 71 foot gray whale. I knew that gray whales didn't get that big so I called the newspaper, which in turn put me in touch with Barbara Mahoney. Barbara works for the National Marine Fisheries Services and is in charge of strandings in the Anchorage area. I asked her if I could tag along when she went out to collect a skin sample.

We met on the bridge that spans the Placer River. The whale was clearly visible from the highway, beached in the mud along the river's edge. It was a female, 41 ft. in length. Someone had placed flowers on her carcass and a rope was tied around her flukes. I had never been so close to a gray whale. She was lying on her side with her urogenital and mammary slits clearly exposed. Steam poured out of her blowholes, the heat generated by rapid decomposition while magpies pecked at her eyes.

The next day, again in the newspaper I spotted another article about the gray whale on the beach. This time it was a call for volunteers to salvage the bones for the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The new center was built to represent all the indigenous peoples of Alaska including the whaling cultures found along the Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. The Heritage Center needed a whale so a permit had been secured in advance for the next one that washed up in the area.

When I called to volunteer, I spoke to Kenny Timberwolf Gardner, the Spirit Guide for the center. He is of Haida descent. His were a fishing people but he had recognized the need for a whale. Kenny was the one who had tied the rope around the flukes and placed the flowers on its body. He told me to meet him there on the river bank the next day and to bring any knives that I had with me.

When I arrived on the beach the next morning I expected to see a crowd of Native men. Instead, the gathering consisted of me and seven other white women, mostly school teachers, armed with kitchen knives. We were his team and we had four days to get the bones out before the next high tide took the whale back out to sea. We were to meet again on the beach the following day, a Saturday, for the purification ceremony.

This was when I knew, as they say, that "I wasn't in Kansas anymore." The whale had washed up on Athabaskan Indian land. The Athabaskan chief, an Alutiiq shaman from Kodiak Island, and Kenny acting as the Spirit Guide, would need to perform a purification ceremony on both the whale and us before we would be allowed to touch the carcass. Chanting prayers, Kenny burned sage flowers and dusted us with an eagle feather. Once we were purified, the same ceremony was performed on the whale. We then cut off the tip of one of the flukes and buried it in a pit along with more flowers and offerings of dried fish. Finally we could pierce the whale.

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2005 Puget Sound Georgia Basin Research Conference

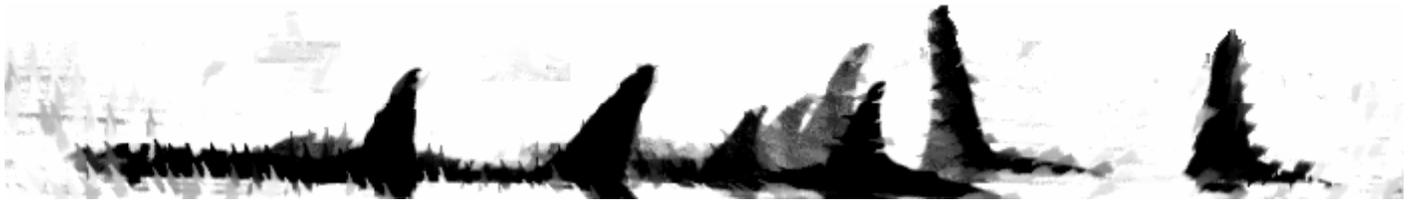
by Joe Olson

On March 29-31 of this year, Seattle played host to a critical conference on the status of the Salish Sea ecosystem. Over 800 people participated in the 2005 Puget Sound Georgia Basin Research Conference, held at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center in downtown Seattle. The Puget Sound Action Team (www.psat.wa.gov) and Georgia Basin Action Plan (www.pyr.ec.gc.ca/georgiabasin) organized the conference, which was the second such transboundary event. The previous Georgia Basin Puget Sound Research Conference was held in Vancouver in 2003. In addition, there have been five previous Puget Sound Research Conferences supported by the Puget Sound Action Team and its partners. This year's event drew scientists, First Nations and tribal government representatives, resource managers, community leaders, policy makers, educators, and students together to share science and information about the condition and management of the Salish Sea. The theme for this year's conference was *Science for the Salish Sea: a Sense of Place, a Sense of Change*.

The Puget Sound Action Team's mission is to Protect and Restore Puget Sound, and the conference came on the heels of the release of their *2004 State of the Sound* report. In their report, PSAT warns, "While the Puget Sound appears as beautiful as ever, its rich web of life is at risk." The reason it is at risk is because "the region's significant population growth, with accompanying increases in paved surfaces; alteration and loss of habitat; and toxic contaminants entering the water, all challenge government and private-sector efforts to keep pace with, or get ahead of, the problems." The report goes on to warn that because so much valuable habitat has already vanished, we must avoid further habitat loss whenever we can, and "Preventing harm is a far more practical and cost-effective strategy than trying to restore damaged areas." PSAT concludes, "Laudable as they are, today's efforts aren't reaching the scale necessary to get the job done." We need to work harder to create less of an impact on our ecosystem.

During her address to all of the conference attendees at the first day's lunch, Governor Christine Gregoire echoed the concern of the PSAT report and emphasized that the human population growth of the Salish Sea was a major pressure on the health of the ecosystem. Before Europeans began settling in the Puget Sound Georgia Basin region, it is estimated that there were only 17,000 people living here. The current population of the region is approximately 7 million people and is expected to rise to 9 million by 2025. Many of the ecological problems that result from so many people living in one place were discussed in the hundreds of talks during the conference. Because the talks were presented during six concurrent sessions, it was impossible to see more than a sixth of the fascinating, sometimes discouraging, and other times hopeful presentations.

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Report on River Dolphins from Bangladesh

by Benazir Ahmed, 2004 Grant Recipient and Stephanie Norman, ACS/PS Grants Chair

(Continued from page 1)

Due to the difficult logistics of traveling to the United States to present a talk on this project at one of our general meetings, Professor Ahmed kindly provided a copy of the report based on his research findings, part of which was funded by our grant. Here is a summary of his report, but first, we would like to commend Professor Ahmed for his dedication and hard work in helping secure a future for the shushuk river dolphin in Bangladesh.

Visual surveys were conducted for shushuk, *Platanista gangetica*, in the lower Sangu River (from Dohazari Bridge to the river mouth), a stretch of approximately 50km, and the connecting 30km long Sikalbaha-Chandkhali khal (canal) using motorized boats during March and April 2004. A total of four surveys were conducted in the Sangu River portion (twice a month), and four surveys of the canal (twice a month), for both months. The research team consisted of one project leader and four research assistants with prior training in river dolphin surveys. Surveys of the Sangu River proper revealed 24, 26, 27, & 24 sightings of shushuk groups for a total of 43, 44, 62, & 49 individuals, respectively. In the Sikalbaha-Chandkhali canal surveys, there were 14, 18, 17, & 13 sightings of 24, 26, 24, & 23 individuals, respectively. The segment of the Sangu River downstream of the Dohazari Bridge contained the highest density of dolphins and, according to the most recent reliable information, has the highest encounter rate recorded for the species in their distribution range.

Data on water depth, salinity, temperature and pH were also collected as well as recordings of fishing activities in the river. The most abundant fishing gear found in the Sangu River was the bag net (*behundi jaal*) which made up 36% of all gears recorded. In the Sikalbaha-Chandkhali canal, the most abundant type of gear was the cast net which accounted for 53% of all recorded gear types.

During March and September 2004, two trips were made to Dhaka to discuss the issues related to the establishment of a protected area for the dolphins in the Sangu with key government personnel from the Department of Forestry, Ministry of Environment and Forests, and the Director of Fisheries, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries. Another visit was made to the Bashkhali Upazilla Fishery Office in Chittagong during October

2004 to promote a conservation and awareness program.

Information gathered from studies conducted in 2003 and 2004 seems to support protection of the dolphins in the Sangu River and the protected area in question. Dependency on fishing is strong in the lower Sangu River which has been practiced for generations and is often the only means of livelihood of many households. A protected area will restrict illegal and destructive fishing in the river which will ensure good recruitment and an increase in fish production of the area for a safer and healthier habitat for the river dolphins which will also be acceptable to the local people.

Based on studies conducted so far, it is apparent further work will be necessary to ensure the continued safety of the dolphins. A long-term dolphin monitoring program will be required to assess the efficacy of fisheries regulations for protecting the Sangu dolphin population. Surveys should continue to be conducted, and the standardized protocol developed during the study should be consistently applied, with

effort and observations accurately documented.

If fisheries regulations prove effective at reducing the factors that threaten dolphins, government officials from the Ministry of Environment and Forest and the Ministry of Fisheries should consider designating the lower Sangu as a multiple-use protected area. The idea would be to allow fisheries and other human activities that do not threaten the animals while prohibiting activities that result in accidental kills and degrade ecological productivity. Establishment of a protected area should be accompanied by the development and implementation of a science-based conservation plan. This action would demonstrate the commitment of the government of Bangladesh towards conserving aquatic mammals and provide a focus for ecotourism and fundraising to support long-term dolphin protection.

An intensive program to raise awareness of the conservation value and needs of river dolphins should be initiated in human communities surrounding the lower Sangu River. Integrating dolphin education into primary school curricula may be the most effective approach for getting children to educate their parents about the importance of conserving these animals.



Map showing part of Kamapshuli and Sangu rivers with the connecting Sikalbaha-Chandkhali canal. (source: B. Ahmed)



A New Pair of Glasses

(Continued from page 4)

The reason for piercing a whale before salvaging the bones is expanding gases. Whales can explode when they decompose and the bones are heavy when they fall. We were very cautious when we first approached the whale. One person handled the spear while the rest of us just stood back. It took over an hour to cut through 10 inches of blubber but when the gas came out everyone knew it. I had certainly never heard a sound like that before but the smell of a dead whale is also distinctive and one that I'll never forget.

We made slow progress the first day until we got more help. On the second day two firemen brought a block and tackle to pull the bones. In addition two marine biologists spotted us from the highway as they were returning home from a fishing trip. They brought the chainsaw. We had to throw it away after we finished the project but it did speed things up. I was able to examine the internal organs which were still intact. In the esophagus there were a few bits of gravel and some herring roe. I knew that this whale had been eating shortly before it died. The gravel was the only part of the whale that I was allowed to keep.

Each evening we would haul the bones from the river bed in the back of my truck. From there I would drive them down the Seward Highway to a paneled van that we had parked at a local resort. Driving down that highway in a cloud of blowflies, I felt like Wilma Flintstone bringing home dinner Alaska style.

The skull was the hardest and heaviest bone to move. It took a crane to get it loaded onto the bed of the truck. We guessed that it might have weighed a ton but we really had no idea. We just knew that it was very heavy. The bones would be buried in the ground at Point Woronzof. The bugs and other microbes in the ground would clean them for us while they were buried. We had no idea how long it would take or if they would ever be used. I just watched them drive away with the bones in the back of the van, and was glad for the experience.

That was the last that I saw of those bones until two years later. It was early October and I was on the side of the mountain that overlooks the Cook Inlet to the south. I was there as part of a nature writing class. About six of us stood in the snow that morning, watching moose rut as the outgoing tide snaked rivers in the mud below. I would spend the morning with the class but planned to leave early, right after lunch, to watch the Animal Spirit Dances at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The dances are held each year in October to honor the spirit of the animals killed during the subsistence hunt. By honoring the animal's spirit, it insures a good hunt the following season. I hadn't seen the dances before and didn't want to miss them that day.

During lunch we huddled in the cold under a canopy of mountain hemlock. While we were eating, I smelled something. Something dead! I didn't want to be near anything dead, not because

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2005 Puget Sound -Georgia Basin Report

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The opening ceremony with Terry Williams and members of the Tulalip Tribes was educational, entertaining and inspiring. Mr. Williams emphasized that humans need to be part of the ecosystem, we must repopulate native species, and we need Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to help us set things right. See *Orcas and Indigenous Wisdom* (Ann Stateler, Whulj Spring 2001, p2-3) for a description of TEK. Unfortunately, the opening ceremony was cut short due to the tight conference schedule.

During the Marine Mammal session on the first day, Howard Garrett challenged cetologists to study sociology in cetaceans. Dr. Robin Baird presented research on diving behavior of killer whales, which has implications for the prey that they eat. Dr. Brad Hanson told us about the two porpoise species that inhabit the Salish Sea – Dall's and harbor porpoises. Anna Hall told us how whale watchers have helped with harbor porpoise research. John Calambokidis presented information on the seasonal resident gray whales in the Puget Sound. The session ended with an exciting talk by Erin Falcone on humpback whales in the Salish Sea. More humpbacks are being seen in our waters and in 2003-2004 thirteen unique individuals were identified in the Puget Sound and Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Day two began with a very interesting session, although it was not as hopeful as the one on marine mammals. The session concerned flame retardants known as PBDEs, which is short for polybrominated diphenyl ether. The general message on these chemicals was that they are persistent like PCBs. However, unlike PCBs, PBDEs are at least partially metabolized as they move up the food web. Unfortunately, the metabolized products may be even more toxic. Dr. Peter Ross delivered a very understandable and very disturbing talk. According to his studies on harbor seals, the concentration of PBDEs in seals will exceed the concentration of PCBs by the year 2020. Dr. Ross was quoted in the local paper for a comment he made during his presentation, where he joked that because of the high levels of PCBs (also a fire retardant) and increasing levels of PBDEs in orcas, "we now have fireproof killer whales!"

In addition to many other talks on toxins and pollution by local experts such as Sandra O'Neill and Gina Ylitalo, there were also presentations on oceanography and climatology. There was a very educational session on Marine Waters Forecasting and Variability on day three. This session included talks on such topics as historical windstorms, water quality, and hydrographic descriptions of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Georgia Strait. The talks on physical oceanography provided some understanding as to why porpoises are routinely seen in particular locations at certain time of the year.

There was so much information presented at the conference, that one month later, I'm still trying to digest it all. Nevertheless, the most important thing that I took home from this three-day gathering is the knowledge that many people are concerned

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Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises: *A World Handbook for Cetacean Habitat Conservation*, by Erich Hoyt

Book Review, by Uko Gorter

As our ACS motto states, “they’re not saved yet”, but how do you exactly save our whales, dolphins, and porpoises? Surely, rescuing stranded pilot whales and disentangling humpbacks is not enough. If we want to really save our cetaceans, we would need to better protect their habitat. While we have seen a steady increase of marine protected areas in the last decades, it is only a tiny fraction of what has been done on land.

With this in mind, Erich Hoyt has set out to highlight this neglected and pressing issue in his latest work, *Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises*. In this expertly written account of the status of cetacean habitat conservation, Erich Hoyt is introducing the reader to its history, defining critical habitat, outlining principles and guidelines of good habitat conservation strategies, and much more.

Hoyt explains the focus on cetaceans, is not only justified by their intrinsic value, but also as indicators of the overall health of their environment. Their popularity and appeal are also assets to promoting and implementing Marine Protected Areas with ecosystem-based management.

Three quarters of the book is taken up by a complete listing – well over 500 – of all currently existing and proposed marine protected area in the world. These are listed as tables and divided in the 18 marine regions. Each table gives the name of the protected area, the cetaceans that can be found in it, as well as other notable species, notes on its history and status, and lastly, important resource and contact information. Interspersed, are also a number of detailed case studies of MPA’s, highlighting the history of their formation and their current status.

This first of its kind reference work, is of immense value to everyone who busies themselves with whale and dolphin conservation, and should be in the hands of every policy maker.

Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises: A World Handbook for Cetacean Habitat Conservation—by Erich Hoyt – illustrations by Pieter A. Folkens— published: 2005, Earthscan, London & Sterling, VA—ISBN: 1-84407-064-6 (paperback) - 492 pages— list price: \$39.95 (paperback), \$139.95 (hardcover)

Vashon Hydrophone Project (VHP) Update—Mark Sears “Whales of Vashon” — continued from page 3

Mark talked about his experience with Springer (A73), so it was fitting for Donna and Kathy to be there. As fellow Orphan Orca Fund partners, they were instrumental in helping Springer return home.

In jarring contrast to Mark’s lovely photos, I played some VHP recordings of boat noise at “Whales of Vashon.” I expect our audience now has greater empathy for what whales habitually endure underwater. In narrow bodies of water like Colvos Pass and Hood Canal, just one loud boat could have a negative impact on killer whales who are trying to forage, rest, or simply maintain contact with each other.

Along with Rich Osborne, Kari Koski, and Ken Balcomb, Mark Sears was recently recognized as an Orca Hero in a new Puget Sound Orcas exhibit at the Seattle Aquarium: “Over the last two decades, Mark and his family have been key participants in protecting local orcas. His collection of whale sightings and identification photos provide the primary record of orcas moving

through Puget Sound. Mark also played an important role in helping reunite a lone orca calf, Springer (A73), with her family in 2002.”

I have been privileged to collaborate with Mark since 1994. If not for Mark’s data, we would not know that Vashon is an excellent location to listen for whales with hydrophones (underwater microphones). The VHP aids in Southern Resident orca recovery by collecting acoustic data to supplement work by researchers like Mark.

In other outreach news, Odin Lonning and I conducted a workshop and represented ACS/PS, the VHP, and our program Keet Shu-ka: An Indigenous Tribute to Killer Whales at the Storming the Sound Environmental Education Conference held in Seattle on February 24. Major conference organizers included People for Puget Sound and the Northwest Environmental Education Council. Odin and I also staffed a VHP educational display at the McMurray Middle School Science Fair on Vashon in March.

2005 Puget Sound -Georgia Basin Report continued from page 6

about the problems our ecosystem faces, and that by working together to correct our errors and stop future ones, we can improve the health of the Salish Sea for all creatures who inhabit it. However, it will take more than just those of us who attended the conference, and more than those of you who read this newsletter. We must talk to our family, friends, and neighbors, and help them to understand the importance of our actions on the well being of the Salish Sea – the life support system for all who live here.

A catastrophic oil spill in Puget Sound could obliterate our Southern Resident orcas. Like many Islanders, Odin and I felt disgusted and helpless as we watched oil sheen drift past our bulkhead and the VHP site during the October Dalco Pass spill. Consequently, and since more spills have occurred recently in Vashon’s waters, we completed the Department of Ecology’s Oil Spill Beach Cleaner training in March. We hope we will never be called to don protective blue “moon suits” when whales are near Vashon.



A New Pair of Glasses—Conclusion (continued from page 6, starts on page 2)

of the odor but because of bears. Bears love the smell of rotting meat and they don't like to share.

I asked if anyone else had smelled it. No one had. But I smelled it again and this time it was distinct. It smelled like a dead whale. I thought that maybe I had something with me that I had worn that day two years ago on the beach but I couldn't come up with anything. I was also the only one in the group who had smelled anything at all, good or bad. And what I had smelled was definitely a whale!

I had to leave in order to get to the dances on time. I climbed down the mountain and drove across town to the Heritage Center. As I watched the dancing, I forgot all about the smell of the whale on the mountain. Behind the dancers skulls of various animals had been placed on the stage. I didn't pay much attention to them. I was focused on the dancers themselves. The movements in the dances tell a story and they are beautiful to watch.

When the dancing ended the area in front of the stage cleared.

There in the center of the stage was a whale skull. I don't know why I hadn't noticed it before but it looked familiar. I found someone who might be able to tell me something about it. I wanted to know if it was "my" whale.

It was. The bones had been dug up the week before and the skull was put on display for the spirit dances. The hour before, while I was eating lunch on the side of the mountain, the whale's spirit had been ceremonially released at the Alaska Native Heritage Center on the other side of town. It had been released at the same time that I had smelled that long dead whale from two years before.

Since then I have seen other whales in Alaska. Sometimes I see them in the water where I expect to them to be. There are other times that I find them in unexpected places, like on the side of a mountain, in drum beats, or carried on a breeze. Those days on the beach taught me to see things from a different perspective. It was like putting on a new pair of glasses. When I did, the whales came.

ACS/PS Educational Outreach — by Peggy Foreman

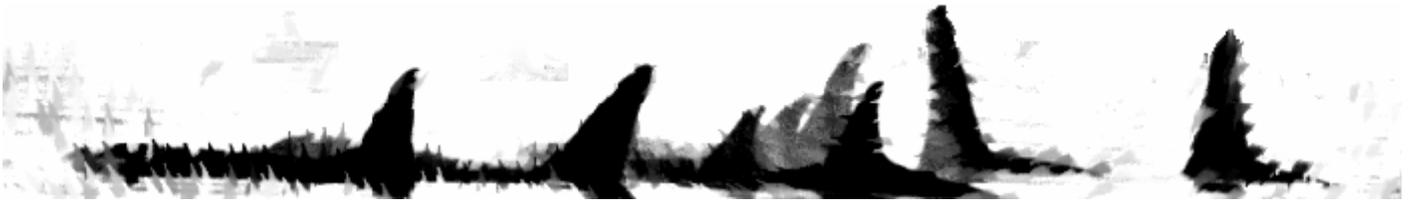
Whales, dolphins, porpoise...oh, my! My heart skips a beat every time I get the opportunity to speak about the marine mammals of the Puget Sound. To see kids eyes light up and hear all of their "whale stories" or experiences is a pretty infectious experience. My two latest presentations really blew me out of the water in terms of quality, organization, and the vision that these students are OUR future. On March 5th, middle school girls from around the state gathered at Seattle University for Seattle's Expanding Your Horizons Conference. They created and participated in a plethora of science activities and I had the opportunity to share with them the concerns that resident and transient killer whales are faced with here in the Pacific Northwest. We focused on three main concerns: toxins, prey availability, and noise pollution. I wanted these girls to know that we need good scientists like them and that they had a voice in protecting our oceans, cetaceans, and other precious resources. We rely on the Puget Sound for so many things and I wanted them to know that there are organizations like ACS in which they could get involved and learn more about stewardship.

Then on March 23rd, over 1000 Kitsap County fourth grade students arrived at Olympic College in Bremerton for the Kitsap Water Festival. This event provided hands-on learning in a fun and memorable atmosphere, presented by exhibitors and professionals in environmental and natural resources fields and environmental entertainers. This watershed education program showcased the dynamics of water and demonstrated how pollutants travel overland and underground to eventually reach streams, ground water, and the Puget Sound. The program teaches students how their actions affect water quality. There were 7 special performances, 8 outdoor exhibits, and 43 classroom presentations. ACS was privileged to have a class called,

Cetaceans of the Puget Sound. Due to the closeness of Easter, every child received a plastic Easter egg filled with chocolate and a whale fact. Then the students created groups with the species they received in their egg. Each group presented their facts about their cetacean to the whole group. I don't know who had more fun, the kids or myself! The Kitsap Water Festival was a celebration of water, but more importantly it instilled in our youth an awareness of protecting our water for their future, as well as generations to come.

I'm constantly reminded of my favorite quote by Baba Dioum, which says: "In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." What an honor it was to promote stewardship with fellow organizations that share the same vision.

In the upcoming months, we have two more events in which we will be present. The next one is on May 19th at Penny Creek Elementary's "Science Day". Then on June 2nd we will support the Hood Canal Youth Summit, which is sponsored by State Parks and the Department of Ecology. About 150 student delegates from around Hood Canal who have been doing water quality monitoring will be coming together to share information and to learn from agency and community people at Fort Flagler State Park. They want us to focus on the presence of Orcas in the Hood Canal based on current research that would tie in with Hood Canal water quality and marine mammals. Our work continues to promote awareness and supports our community taking action. If you have a school or event in which you would like us to present, please contact us and we would be delighted to share our expertise.



Japanese Orca Pod Tragedy—Interview with Erich Hoyt

(Continued from page 3)

contaminants by a Japanese university have shown PCB accumulation 11 times that of other Japanese coastal cetaceans. The numbers were especially high in the males and calves, as would be suspected because the females can pass on their concentrations through the milk.

Bonnie: Do you think the adult orcas stayed in a precarious situation to help the calves and to help each other as they were trapped?

Erich: Yes, this is our feeling. One of the divers found a dead female orca lying on the surface with the dead calf tucked under her between her flippers. She seemed to be trying to protect the calf from the ice. It may have been that the females refused to leave the young calves, either because one or more of them were ill or just very young, and may have become trapped in ice. If these females stayed around, then the rest of the pod might have been reluctant to leave as well. With fast moving ice, the situation might have become irreversible very quickly.

Bonnie: How will this effect the population of orcas in this area? Is there enough research available to estimate the population? Since the local Puget Sound pods are so well known, I think our readers will find it interesting to have an idea of what is known about populations of orca in other areas of the world.

Erich: We are trying to establish population estimates for Far East Russia and Japan. From what we know around Kamchatka where we have studied orcas for 6 summers, they break down into resident and transient type orcas like the orcas in the eastern Pacific, with the western Pacific residents feeding mainly on salmon and also Atka mackerels. The group sizes are similar on both sides of the Pacific and we think the population sizes are also small -- in the low hundreds. The Russian Far East is a huge area and there is much to learn but if our preliminary findings hold true, then it means the loss of 11 or 12 animals, including three breeding females and their calves, which is definitely a blow for the community or population they belong to. Think about losing that number of animals from the southern or even northern residents. For orcas, this loss is significant. But how significant we don't know yet.

Bonnie: What was the reaction in Japan to this story?

Erich: There was tremendous public curiosity especially in Hokkaido, but also in Tokyo and around Japan as well. It was on the TV news and in the newspapers every day for more than a week. Most of the public reaction was sympathy toward the plight of the whales. Some people were very upset to hear about the mothers and calves and how they all died together. The local interest was sympathetic too, as they tried to help the whales.

Bonnie: I know that Japan routinely captures and kills dolphins (in the yearly "drive fishery") and that they continue to hunt large whales despite the International Whaling Commission

moratorium on hunting. Do you think that this might influence the public to push for more protection of cetaceans in general? I'm thinking of the well known human trait of "falling in love" with a charismatic mammal, especially when children become aware of a sad situation (as what happened with Keiko) and then working for more protection for that animal.

Erich: We hope that this will make a strong and lasting impression but the Japanese people -- even the many young people who are sympathetic toward living whales and dolphins and who go whale watching around Japan and elsewhere within the Pacific Rim -- have been unable to change their government's policy. With Kotoe Sasamori, I am now trying to write the story of the Shiretoko orcas, in part to tell what happened and also to keep the memory of these orcas alive. In death, these orcas touched so many people.

Bonnie: Erich, thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions and for informing the ACS/Puget Sound members about these orca in Japan. Thank you too for all the work you are doing for the Far Eastern Orca Project. The more we understand about these fascinating mammals, the more we will be able to help protect them around the world.

16th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals

Registration is open for the 16th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals. This conference by the Society for Marine Mammalogy will be held December 12 thru 16, 2005, at the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego, California. For registration and more information go to the conference website (www.marinemammalogy.org/conference2005/).

A number of ACS/PS board members will be attending. Both Joe Olson, owner of Cetacean Research Technology, and Uko Gorter, Natural History Illustration, will be exhibitors at this conference. Stop by at their booths.

Studying Cetaceans from Kites

As part of his 2002 South Pole journey, Eric Muhs developed a kite aerial photography project to record unique views of the Antarctic experience. Since then, he's flown cameras from kites in Hawaii, Easter Island, Mexico, and the east and west coasts of the US. In 2004, working with Puerto Vallarta whale researcher Oscar Frey, Muhs traveled to San Ignacio Lagoon in Baja California Sur, Mexico to demonstrate the application of kite aerial photography techniques for cetacean study.

On June 15th, at our ACS/PS monthly, in addition to a short introduction to the natural history of grey whales, Muhs will discuss the results and future prospects of the kite aerial photography work and show a lot of beautiful pictures of whales.

AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY



Puget Sound Chapter
P.O. Box 17136
Seattle, WA 98127-0836

www.acspugetsound.org
info@acspugetsound.org
(206) 781-4860

address label

address correction requested

SAVE THE DATE—Wednesday May 18
PAT WEYER
Sacred Vessels and the Human-Dolphin Relationship
Wednesday June 15
ERIC MUHS
Studying Cetaceans from Kites

see acspugetsound.org for Speaker Series details
Phinney Neighborhood Center, Room 6, 6532 Phinney Ave. N., Seattle, 7-9 pm, (just north of the Woodland Park Zoo)

**YES!— ENROLL ME AS A MEMBER OF THE
PUGET SOUND CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY!**

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