



Spring 2010

Sea Notes

Newsletter of the Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation



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Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting awareness and conservation of the marine environment through education and research in New England.

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Whale Trends, 2007-2009



By Dianna Schulte

As we have mentioned in previous newsletters, the 2009 summer whale watching season on Jeffreys Ledge was the best in years. The number of whales, variety of behaviors and amount of time spent by the whales on the Ledge was incredible. Even the pelagic bird life impressed the experienced birders and non-birders alike!

To better document this, I put together a



Fin whale in a sea of birds

couple of charts showing the trends in whale sightings over the past three seasons. The first

(Figure 1, page 3) shows the numbers of each of the three most commonly

(Continued on page 3)

Female Humpbacks Prevalent in 2009

By Dianna Schulte

The summer of 2009 provided us with record-matching numbers of humpback whales seen feeding on Jeffreys Ledge. But who exactly were these hungry visitors with whom we spent some exciting times?

Humpback whales typically will lift their flukes out of the water when they are diving, giving us a helpful hint as to their identity. Each humpback whale tail has a different pigmentation pattern, much like each human has different

fingerprints. Of the 1,207 humpback whales seen in 2009, 790 (65%) were positively identified (matched to the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalog) based on the black and white pigmentation on the ventral side of their flukes.

Humpback whales have been very well-studied since the early 1970's, hence we have a great amount of information on the individuals. Simply watching and recording the whales from year to

year can give us insight as to who they are. For example, if a whale is seen with a calf, we know that whale is female as males do not take part in parenting the calves. If we get a look at that calf's tail, we will be able to identify it in future years and then know what year it was born and its current age.

Additionally, some organizations collect small samples of tissue from whales to give us further information about

(Continued on page 2)

Female humpbacks, continued from page 1

2009 Humpbacks

The following named humpbacks were seen at least once during our 2009 season (May-October):

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Basmati | Mudskipper |
| Basmati's 2009 calf | Newton |
| Blackout | Nine |
| Boomerang | Obtuse |
| Cajun | Owl |
| Chickadee | Patches |
| Chromosome | Patchwork |
| Churn | Pina |
| Cinder | Pina's 2009 calf |
| Clipper | Pinball |
| Clipper's 2009 calf | Polaris |
| Colt | Quote |
| Compass | Quote's 2008 calf |
| Crisp | Raccoon |
| Cygnus | Sabot |
| Diablo | Satula |
| Dice | Scylla |
| Doric | Scylla's 2005 calf |
| Fan | Sedge |
| Filament | Skua |
| Flamingo | Snowplow |
| Flask | Solas |
| Fracture | Sonogram |
| Freckles | Spinnaker |
| Fundy's 2008 calf | Stonewall |
| Glostick | Sword |
| Gondolier | Tigris |
| Grackle | Tornado |
| Hornbill | Touche |
| Ivee | Trident |
| Jabiru | Tripod |
| Komodo | Trough |
| Lacey | Trowel |
| Leukos | Upsilon |
| Literal | Valley |
| Lobo | Venom |
| Midnight | Wizard |
| Milkyway | Zodiac |

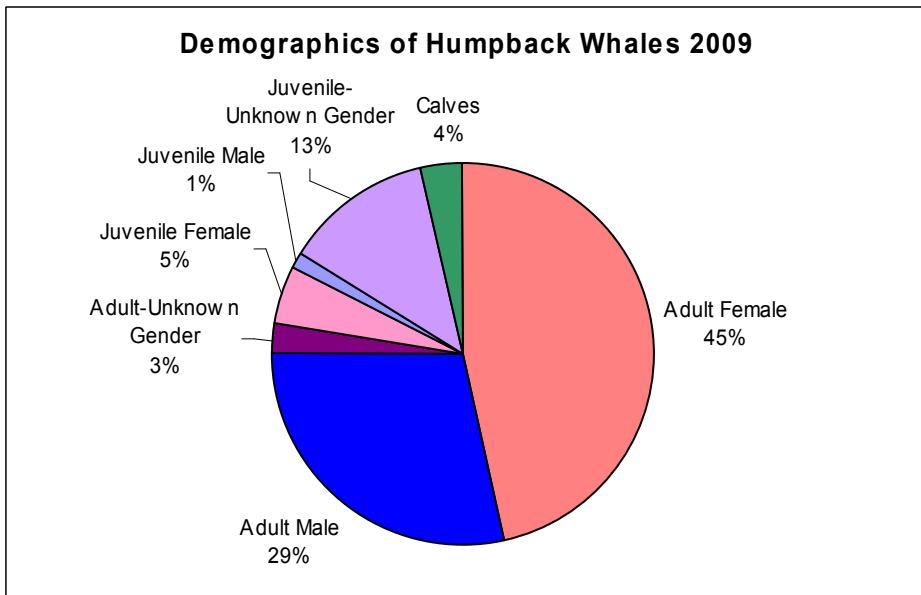


Figure 1. The percentage of humpbacks of each gender and in the age groups of calves (0-1 year old), juveniles (1-5 year old) and adults (6+ years old) seen in 2009.

them, such as gender (if a whale has not calved) and health.

Based on this information, the above chart (Figure 1) depicts the demographics of the humpback whales that were identified on Jeffreys Ledge during the 2009 feeding season.

Interestingly, 45% of the documented humpback whales were adult females. This is exciting for a

biologist studying endangered animals. Productive females are crucial for the repopulation of a species. A male can sire several calves during a season, but a female only reproduces once every two to three years on average.

Stay tuned for more information on our Jeffreys Ledge humpbacks in future issues!



Humpback whales Cygnus (l) and Tornado (r)

Celebrate Earth Day With Us!

Saturday, April 17, 10 AM-1 PM
Cleanup at Peirce Island in Portsmouth, NH
Kids' activities and touch tank, and displays from local organizations!

Sunday, April 18, 10 AM-12 PM
Cleanup at Rye Harbor State Park

Earth Day Sponsors: Flatbread Company, Starbucks Coffee, I World Trading Co., The Oaks Golf Links

Whale Trends, continued from page 1

seen whales in the area: humpbacks, finbacks and minkes. Keep in mind that these are not individual whales, but instead is the total number of whales documented by 3-4 whale watch vessels, meaning that some individual whales may have been seen more than once.

The steady increase over the years in the number of humpback whales observed is evident in spite of the number of whale watch trips from which these data were collected (2007 had about 60 more trips than each of the following years). Also, the finback whale numbers were very similar in 2007 and 2008 but then nearly doubled in 2009! Minke whale counts, as usual, varied throughout the years.

During whale watching trips, a commonly asked question is, "What are the chances that we will see a (choose a species) whale?" The second chart (Figure 2) demonstrates the percentage of trips that each type of whale (or other marine animal) was seen during the past three seasons. Again, the number of trips that one

or more humpback whales were seen climbed steadily from about 30% of trips in 2007 to nearly 75% of trips in 2009. The percentage of trips that a finback whale was seen hovered

around the low to mid 70's in 2007 and 2008 but then spiked to 87% of trips in 2009! Certainly our passengers in 2009 had a very good chance of seeing one or more of these huge animals!

Also on Figure 2, you may notice that not all of the commonly seen species are reported each year. Sei whales were not seen in 2009 but did make a few appearances in 2007-2008. This is not completely unusual, although we did expect to

see a handful this past Fall when the right whales were in the area since both whales tend to eat similar types of food. Pilot whales have also been evasive in recent years. These animals tend to show up in the late summer but were not seen around Jeffreys Ledge in 2007 and 2009.

Fortunately, the crowd-pleasing Atlantic white-sided dolphins, basking sharks and ocean sunfish have been consistent in their sightings over the years, although we would always welcome more opportunities to view these animals! The white-sided dolphin, for example, is typically only seen on about 20% of all whale watching trips on Jeffreys Ledge.

What will the summer of 2010 bring? We impatiently await the start of the whale watching season (mid-May) with hope and excitement. Will we see you out there with us?

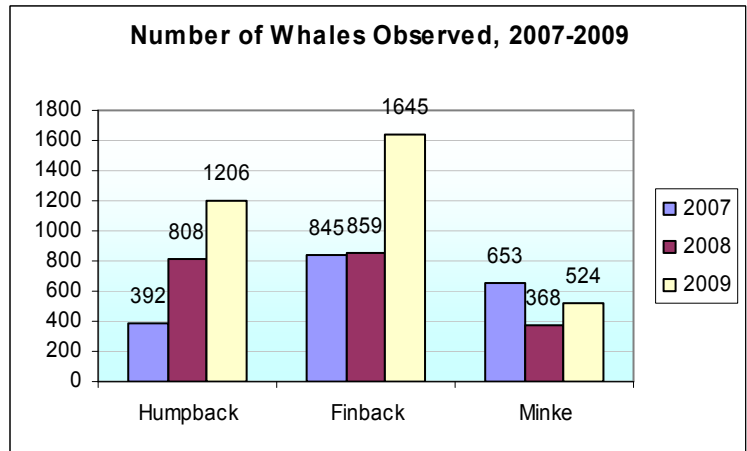


Figure 1. Total number of sightings of humpback, finback and minke whales, 2009.

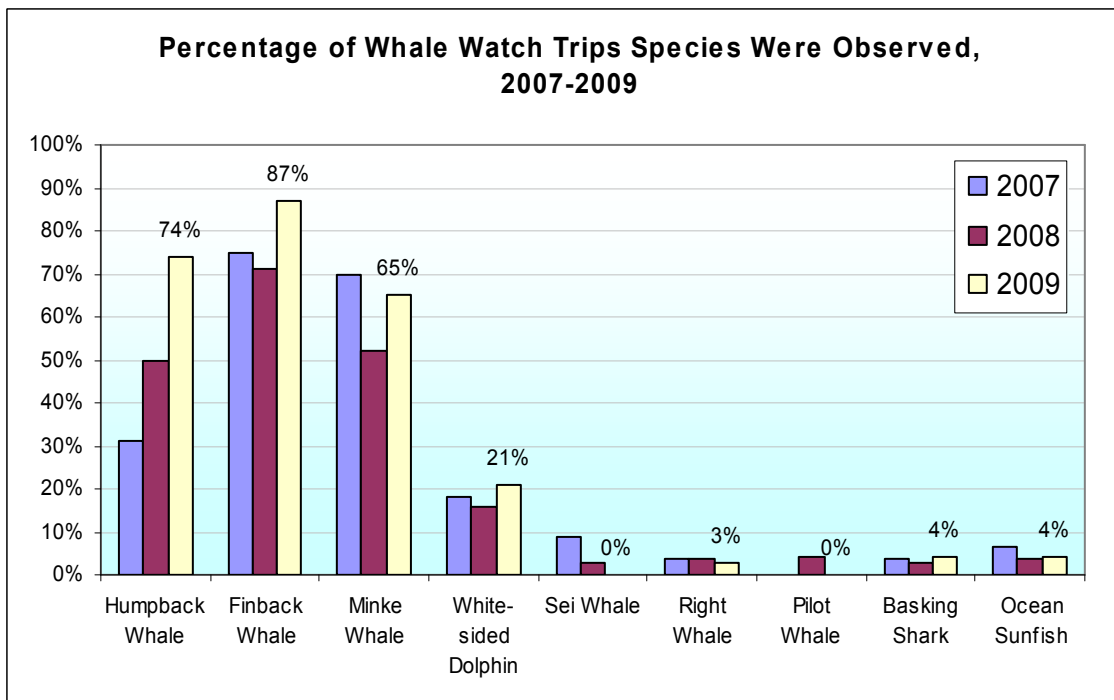


Figure 2. What's your chance of seeing a certain whale species? Here's the percentage of trips that we saw our most common whale species in 2007- 2009. The actual percentage each species was seen in 2009 is written above..

Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation

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www.blueoceansociety.org

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Upcoming Events

Saturday, April 10

Beach Cleanup at Jenness Beach
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Coffee provided by Starbucks Coffee

Saturday, April 17

Earth Day Cleanup at Peirce Island
in Portsmouth

10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Kid-friendly cleanup with free refreshments, on-site touch tank and exhibitors from local organizations and businesses!

Sponsors: Flatbread Company, Starbucks Coffee, 1 World Trading Co.

Sunday, April 18

Earth Day Cleanup at Rye Harbor
State Park

10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Cleanup around Rye Harbor State Park and Foss Beach. Free refreshments. All ages welcome!

Sponsor: The Oaks Golf Links

Thursday, April 22

Happy Earth Day!

Saturday, April 24

Hampton Earth Awareness Fair
Hampton Academy, 29 Academy Ave,
Hampton, NH.

10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Sponsored by Hampton Recycling Education Committee

Saturday, May 8

Beach Cleanup at Jenness Beach
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Coffee provided by Starbucks Coffee

Portsmouth Sustainability Fair

Portsmouth Middle School

Portsmouth, NH

10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Saturday, June 5

Beach Cleanup at Jenness Beach
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

1st whale watches

Now booking educational

programs for schools, groups and libraries! Call (603) 431-0260 or visit www.blueoceansociety.org for more information. Experience our life-sized inflatable whale, traveling tide pools and brand new Enviroscape pollution model!

Join us Memorial Day weekend for this summer's grand opening of our **Marine Life Touch Tank** in **Portsmouth!** Touch tank will be open for regular summer hours daily starting in late June. Visit our web site for details.

Touch tank space donated by Isles of Shoals Steamship Company.

Join us in late June for the re-opening of our **Sea Life Discovery Center in Salisbury Beach, MA!** Open Wednesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. starting June 26
Space donated by SPS New England