

NEWSLETTER OF THE PUGET SOUND CHAPTER
OF THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY

Volume 2, Issue 3

Fall 2001

Sound News

ACS/PS wants to send out our thoughts and wishes to all of our members, their families, and their friends following the tragedy of September 11, 2001.

Nature is always lovely, invincible, glad, whatever is done and suffered by her creatures. All scars she heals, whether in rocks or water or sky or hearts.

—John Muir, from "Wild Wool" (1875)

Election Time

It's that time of year again—time to vote for your board members. The insert of this newsletter is the ACS/PS Election Ballot. Please vote and mail it back to us by September 26th. We would love to have you on board, so we encourage you to add your name to the ballot. Thanks!

General Meetings

We have two great upcoming general meetings. See page 3 for the topics, speakers, and event information.

Toxic Whales

Alarming concentrations of PCBs and DDT were found in a dead orca outside Cordova, Alaska. See page 2.

Whale Friendly Lawns!

Make sure you check out the back page of this newsletter to find out about our Whale Friendly Lawns campaign!

14th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals

The 14th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, sponsored by the Society for Marine Mammalogy, will be held from 28 November to 3 December 2001, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre is hosting this international event. Current research on whales, dolphins, seals, sea lions, and other marine mammals will be showcased through spoken and poster presentations. Special events, video evenings, and vendor exhibits are planned as well.

The conference Web site <http://www.smmconference.org/> is designed to be the primary resource for all information related to the meeting. It will be updated frequently, so please check back often.

For general inquiries: e-mail mmconf@vanaqua.org

For questions about the scientific program: e-mail sciprogram@vanaqua.org

Whale may soon live a wild life

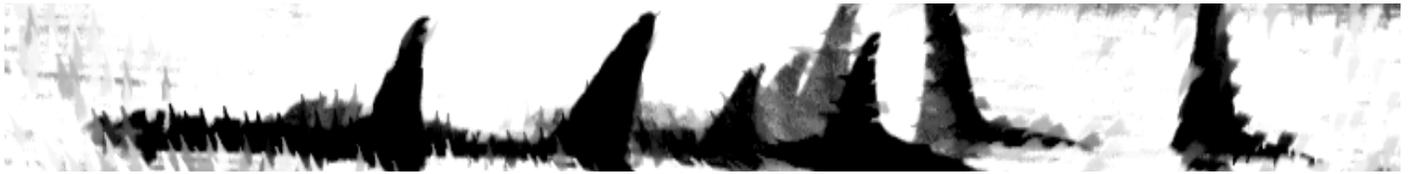
Keiko consistently stays with pods for extended periods of time and travels with them.

From The Seattle Times

August 18, 2001

http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/134330868_keiko18m.html

Keiko's keepers are not ready to shelve the Hollywood ending. The orca star of the 1993 movie "Free Willy" frolicked for several hours amid wild killer whales in the North Atlantic this week, as he has often in the past 30 days. The spurts of adventurous, independent behavior have given Keiko's human crew hope that he could be on the verge of joining his own species for good. "It's possible he will leave with them this year," Charles Vinick said in a telephone interview from Iceland. Vinick is executive vice president of Ocean Futures, the nonprofit organization attempting to reintroduce the long-captive show whale to the wild.



Prince William Sound whale had high levels of poisons

Alarming concentrations of PCBs and DDT found in dead orca

From Today's Daily Journal of Commerce: July 24, 2001

By Doug O'Hara

Anchorage Daily News

ANCHORAGE -- A killer whale that stranded and died last summer outside Cordova was carrying high levels of industrial poisons in its body, offering yet more evidence that pollutants produced thousands of miles away continue to accumulate at the top of Alaska's marine food chain.

These chemicals may now be another factor pushing a genetically unique family of Prince William Sound whales closer to extinction, according to local whale biologists and environmentalists.

"It's more of the same bad news," said biologist Craig Matkin, of the North Gulf Oceanic Society and the region's leading killer whale researcher.

The contaminants found in the dead whale were PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, and the pesticide DDT, chemicals banned or restricted in the United States for decades but still produced in some Asian and Third World countries.

Transported across the globe on air and ocean currents, the contaminants infiltrated Alaska's food chain and have been documented at elevated levels in a wide range of animals for years -- sea otters, seals, walruses, peregrine falcons, northern fur seals and bald eagles. As the chemicals move up the food chain, they concentrate and build in fatty tissues.

As a result, among 77 killer whales tested in the Gulf of Alaska between 1994 and 1999, the highest levels appeared among animals that eat only marine mammals, the type known as transients. Among 10 killer whales sampled in 1999 and 2000, several transients appear to be among the most contaminated marine mammals ever measured.

The whale, part of the group known as AT1, died last July in Hartney Bay. He was a closely studied harbor seal predator nicknamed Eyak. He had concentrated PCBs at about 370 parts per million and DDT at about 470 parts per million in its tissues, according to chemist Gina Ylitalo, of the National Marine Fisheries Service's contaminants lab in Seattle.

Another transient male from the Gulf of Alaska had the highest levels ever measured in Alaska waters -- about 651 parts per million PCBs and about 1,003 parts per million DDTs, according to Matkin's report. That whale, unrelated to the Sound's AT1 group, had a dorsal fin that was bent over, a sign of ailing health among killer whales.

By comparison, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration standard for PCBs in fish for human consumption is 2 parts per million and the limit for DDT is 5 parts per million.

The results were released this spring as part of an annual report by Matkin and four other authors on the status of the Sound's killer whales for the state-federal Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.

Similar levels found recently in killer whales in the Pacific Northwest prompted leading biologist Peter Ross and four others to write in *Marine Pollution Bulletin* that "killer whales in British Columbia can now be considered among the most contaminated cetaceans in the world."

Scientists don't know how the substances affect the long-lived, slow-reproducing killer whales. Whether such elevated levels contributed directly to the death of the 5-ton, 24-foot whale isn't known, Matkin cautioned.

But comparable contaminant loads have been linked to reproductive failures in beluga whales of the industrialized St. Lawrence River estuary, die-offs of striped dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea and European harbor seals.

"It's clearly in the range of potential health risks," Matkin said. "It's scary stuff."

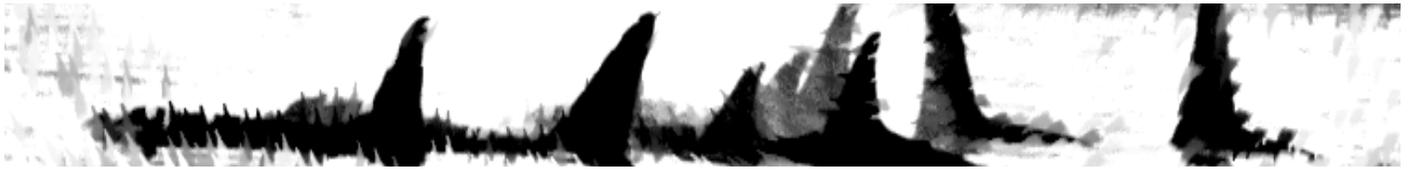
Whatever the cause, the death of Eyak furthered the decline of the AT1 group, an extended family of whales that lost 11 of 22 members in the three years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. These whales, which have never been seen associating with other transients in the region, have not produced any offspring since before the spill.

"The upshot is that they're disappearing so fast that I don't know what we can do for them," Matkin said. "We've been debating about whether to try to get them listed under the Endangered Species Act."

(continued on next page)

ACS/PS Scientific Advisors

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



Another transient whale was found dead June 25 near Johnstone Point on Hinchinbrook Island west of Cordova, an area historically used by Eyak and other AT1 whales, especially a slightly older male known as Eccles. Eyak and Eccles, named for mountains overlooking Orca Inlet near Cordova, often hunted seals together and were well known to people in the Sound.

The overall situation for three separate types of killer whales in the eastern North Pacific Ocean is complex, with some pods increasing and others in decline. For instance, the Sound's famous AB pod of resident whales has declined overall from 36 to 25 between 1988 and 2000 and is still not considered recovered from the oil spill by the Trustee Council. The number of other known Gulf of Alaska resident whales increased from 81 to 110 during the same period.

Membership Renewal

It has come to our attention that a few members have received their renewal notices later than expected. Some have received them the month renewal is actually due. These occurrences have been discussed with the national board and efforts are under way to review the renewal process in an effort to produce a more efficient and timely delivery of renewal notices.

If you have not received your renewal notice or would like to know when your membership renewal is due, please contact us at: acs@cetaceanresearch.com

Fishing With Bulldozers *or* Where Have All the Cod Gone?

by

Elliott A. Norse, Ph.D.—President, Marine Conservation Biology Institute

Thursday, September 27

Although high seas driftnetting and dynamite fishing have gotten far more attention, the most destructive fishing technology worldwide is bottom trawling. Fishermen use trawling and similar methods to catch most of the world's shrimps and scallops, as well as oysters, crabs, flatfishes and roundfishes. Trawlers pull heavy nets across the bottom. In the process, they crush, bury and expose seafloor life to predators and scavengers. Because the great majority of marine species are benthic and are tied to seafloor structures in various ways, trawling has very harmful effects on biological diversity, including the young of many species of commercially important fishes that need seafloor structures as feeding and hiding places. Because benthic and pelagic food webs are coupled, trawling affects both benthic feeders, such as gray whales, and pelagic feeders, including the majority of cetaceans.

EYE OF THE WHALE: Epic Passage from Baja to Siberia

by

Dick Russell

Tuesday, October 23

From the touch of a whale to the thrust of a harpoon, *EYE OF THE WHALE: Epic Passage From Baja to Siberia* is the record of Russell's extraordinary journey to places, both physical and metaphysical, that he never imagined going. Ultimately, the book reveals what the gray whale has taught him — and has the potential to teach all of us — about mystery and trust, about the spirit of place, about the animal kingdom, about our fellow human beings, and about ourselves.

Dick Russell is the author of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Black Genius: And the American Experience*. He is also a longtime environmental journalist, whose work has appeared in *Boston Magazine*, *Harper's Weekly*, *The Nation*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, among other publications.

Odyssey - The Maritime Discovery Center
2201 Alaskan Way, Pier 66, Seattle Waterfront
Next to Anthony's Pier 66 Restaurant
Parking is available on Alaskan Way or in the pay lot across the street

Doors open at **7:00** pm • Program begins at **7:30** pm

Admission is FREE

For more info call: (206) 297-1310

E-mail: acs@cetaceanresearch.com

AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY



Puget Sound Chapter
P.O. Box 17136
Seattle, WA 98107

Email: acs@cetaceanresearch.com
Phone: 206-297-1310

LABEL

Whale Friendly Lawns!

We are excited to announce a new campaign designed to draw attention to the relationship between what we do on land and its effects on the marine environment. This is called a **Whale Friendly Lawn** campaign. We, along with *Project Sea Wolf*, *The Whaleman Foundation*, and *Mosquito Fleet Charters*, will be distributing lawn signs to everyone who is interested. The signs proclaim that the holder practices environmentally friendly (**Whale Friendly!**) lawn- and garden-care practices. We are providing these signs free of charge!

Please visit our web site at www.cetaceanresearch.com/acs/ to view a copy of the sign and to learn how to place your order for a free sign! You can also read the covenant sheet that will be provided with each sign. The covenant sheet provides greater detail on this campaign.

We hope all of you will join us in this educational campaign!

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

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES: (check one)

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: (____) _____
E-mail: _____

- \$500 Patron
- \$250 Contributing
- \$75 Supporting
- \$45 Family
- \$35 Active
- \$25 Student/Teacher/Senior

Make check payable to ACS and mail to: ACS/Puget Sound Chapter, P.O. Box 17136, Seattle, WA 98107-0836

