



Spyhopper

Watching the Grays Go By

ACS/LA Gray Whale Census and Behavior Project

The eastern north Pacific gray whale is somewhat of a miraculous, if tentative, success story. Other gray whale populations in the Atlantic and western north Pacific have not made the same kind of recovery after the hunting of the 1850s in their calving lagoons and the frighteningly efficient floating whaling factory ships of the early 1900s. But the eastern grays we see migrating down and then back up the California coast from December to May are showing stronger signs of recovery.

Those who observe this eastern Pacific population know that it can still be fragile and vulnerable, even though the gray whale has been moved off of the endangered species list (1994). Ecological changes that affect their food sources, natural threats, and anthropogenic dangers can easily have long-term effects on their still small total population.

The Los Angeles chapter of the American Cetacean Society has conducted a long-term, shore-based study off of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, just north of Los Angeles harbor, for 27 years. Trained volunteers have put in thousands of hours perched in the cold wind at the cliff's edge, first at Marineland of the Pacific, and then at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center, to maintain the gray whale census project and collect data on other marine mammals. The project is unique not only for its consistent marine mammal reporting, but in the fact that it is one of the longest running citizen-based science programs in the nation.



Vigilant volunteers have built a valuable database through consistent observation that helps identify and confirm trends in marine life population and behavior. Top to bottom: Kris Clifford, Linda Jebo, Joyce Daniels, Natalie Massey, Evi Meyer, Kathleen Russo, Danny Gonzalez

The census has its roots in early ACS history, spearheaded by ACS members John Olguin, Laura Osteen, and Bill Samaras. The first counts began at the Pt. Fermin office in San Pedro in the 1960s and 1970s when trained ACS volunteers kept chalk board counts for discussion with curious park visitors. Initial census projects from Catalina Island (off Los Angeles) and Marineland were coordinated by Bill Samaras and Laura Osteen in partnership with the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in San Pedro. The long-term, consistent tracking that was the foundation of today's census program began in January 1984 when Alisa Schulman-Janiger reorganized the effort with specific, standardized goals.

Photo by Alisa Schulman-Janiger

Eyes on the grays, cont.

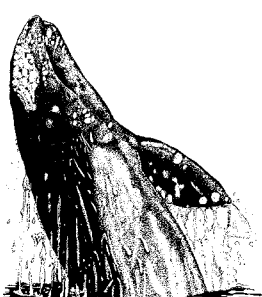
Alisa coordinated and trained volunteers, standardized data reporting and observation times, and included priorities such as calf identification and observations on other species. The project, directed by Alisa (who is an ACS/LA Chapter board member), evolved to become a valuable resource for data that, over time and with comparison to other scientific observations, reveals important trends in the behavior and progress of the gray whales and other marine animals.

The census project now runs during daylight hours from December 1 through May 15, seven days a week. Volunteers record weather, visibility and sea conditions at least every 30 minutes, along with observation of marine mammals and their behaviors, focusing primarily on gray whales. Alisa describes the primary purpose of the dedicated, trained volunteers who maintain the observation station: "Because the majority of local gray whales use offshore

migration routes, we see only a small proportion of the total gray whale population from our vantage point. Observations can vary greatly due to weather and shifts in their migratory path preferences. Our project focuses on consistent observation of this nearshore migratory path to document changing trends over time." The observers detail calf sightings in both the south and northbound migration to track the critical trends in recruitment from season to season.

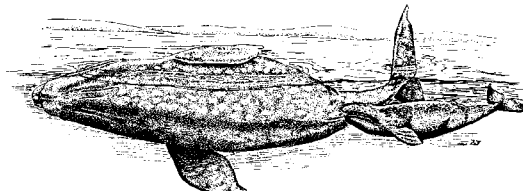

The project's data has been shared and utilized in many ways. Alisa cites one of the most valuable as the collaboration that takes place with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) which has conducted the official gray whale census since the mid 1950s. The ACS/LA census provides a valuable, dependable point of comparison with the NMFS that helps to confirm long-term

Gray Whale



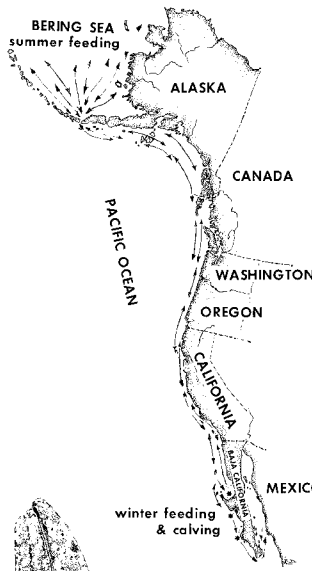
BREACHING

MOTHER WITH NURSING CALF

MOTHER AND CALF

ANNUAL MIGRATION ROUTE
10,000 - 14,000 mile round trip



BERING SEA
summer feeding

ALASKA

CANADA

PACIFIC OCEAN

WASHINGTON

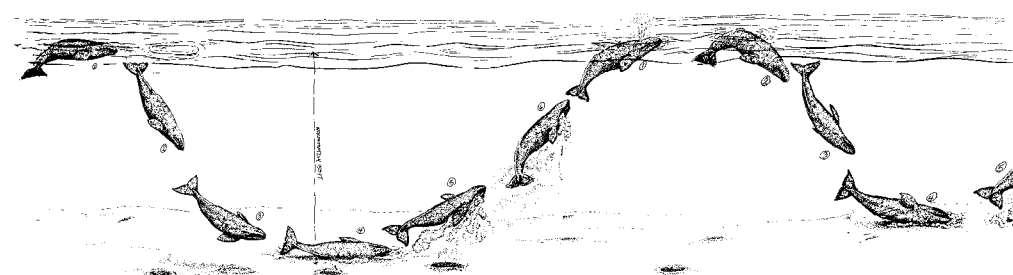
OREGON

CALIFORNIA

MEXICO


winter feeding & calving

* Lagoons

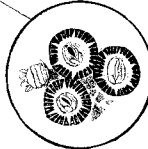


FEEDING PATTERN

Gray Whales feed by filtering bottom dwellers from the ocean floor



SPYHOPPING



BARNACLES & LICE

Another piece of ACS history, this teaching aid created by Robin A. Makowski and Diana McIntyre in 1983 is still used today.



A gray whale aptly demonstrates the behavior for which this newsletter is named. Photo © Alisa Schulman-Janiger.

trends. The data is also shared with an educational website called “Journey North” that shows migration progress of animals, including the gray whales. Students can track migrations and ask questions on this site, which can be used in classroom settings

During the 2008-2009 season, 66 volunteers, some with more than ten years of experience, logged in 1944 observation hours over 166 days. Using binoculars and spotting scopes to confirm and detail sightings, the volunteers are doing more than counting mammals. They are documenting behaviors such as breaching, spyhopping, rolling, courtship, nursing, feeding, interactions with other marine mammals, interactions with ships, any harassment incidents, and entanglements. Volunteers have logged detailed observations of many species of whales, dolphins, porpoises, sea lions, seals, and southern sea otters. They often cross-check and augment data on individually identifiable cetaceans by collaborating with commercial and private whale-watching boats.

Alisa reports that, “Last season, fifteen marine mammal species including breaching humpback whales, and record numbers of lunge-feeding fin whales and bottlenose dolphin (including one dolphin birth) kept enthusiasm high, while near-record low gray whale counts frustrated us

during the season.” Though counts do fluctuate greatly due to weather and migratory paths, the low gray whale counts and reduced calf counts were trends seen by other coastal census stations last season as well, including the NMFS.

Sample Data from Last Season:

- Northbound and southbound counts were our 2nd lowest; fewer southbound but more northbound gray whales than last season:
 - 303 southbound (461 last season)
 - 677 northbound (634 last season)
- Over 25 previous seasons, counts have greatly fluctuated:
 - Southbound range: 301-1291
 - Northbound range: 634-3412
- Calf counts were lower than last year’s:
 - 18 southbound calves (25 last season)
 - This is our 5th highest newborn calf percentage; record was set during the 1997-98 season (106 calves).
 - 52 northbound calves (63 last season)
 - Record of 222 calves observed in 1996-97.

More data can be found on the ACS/LA web site. You can also see updates as this season’s observations are recorded on the site. Alisa Schulman-Janiger has used the data in many of her publications. Contact her at janiger@cox.net to obtain these publications in PDF format, or for information about volunteering for the census project.

A Note from Alisa: Are you a photographer?

You can contribute to the California killer whale photo-identification project by sending photos and sighting data to janiger@cox.net. We will try to match images to our catalog, and notify you with the results.



A Message from our New National Director - Cheryl McCormick

In assuming the office of Executive Director for the American Cetacean Society, I feel impelled by a sense of gratitude to express my profound appreciation for this honor, and am thrilled at the tremendous possibilities that lie before us. Since beginning my duties with ACS, I have had the pleasure and privilege of talking with ACS members, educators, researchers, and conservationists, all of whom are passionate about cetacean protection and dedicated to the mission and hard work of ACS on behalf of these awe-inspiring “ambassadors of the seas.”

I am enthusiastic about what I have seen and learned thus far - and I’ve only just begun! I look forward to elevating the importance of our common core values by embracing the vibrancy and enthusiasm already thriving at ACS. We will work even harder to build strong, effective conservation alliances, raise awareness of the plight of imperiled species through education, and increase our partnerships with some of the world’s most prominent researchers in cetology and marine sciences. There is no shortage of important issues ACS might take up in the future, and I am pleased to announce that we are moving ahead with purpose and determination on issues that lie at the very heart of our mission.

I look forward to the challenges and triumphs ahead, but I cannot do it without your help. As an ACS member you are, and have always have been, the key component to our success. You have an extremely important role to play in the organization’s future ability to perform the work that is vital to our mission. Indeed, there’s never been a better, more exciting or more important time to be a member of ACS.

My hope is that each person who learns about ACS will develop a personal culture of conservation and devotion to protecting the beauty and diversity of whales, dolphins, and porpoises and their increasingly imperiled habitats. Over four decades ago, Elizabeth “Bemi” DeBus and Clark Cameron, founders of ACS, were among the first to realize the importance of taking action to protect whales. Today, their enthusiastic, pioneering spirit and passion for whale conservation is alive and vibrant in a modern ACS.

Thank you all so much for the warm welcome! I’m looking forward to talking with you at an upcoming ACS Chapter meeting, or please feel free to contact me at c.mccormick@acsonline.org.



ACS is fortunate to have gained Cheryl, her amazing energy, skills, and years of non-profit management and fund raising experience. Dr. McCormick relocated to San Pedro from Monterey, California to take on the directorship. She was most recently the Director of Conservation for the Santa Lucia Conservancy. Cheryl oversaw ecological research, natural resource management, conservation projects and citizen science initiatives for the Santa Lucia Preserve in Carmel. Her years as a plant ecologist have given Cheryl a keen interest in many environmental and conservation issues. A recent stint as a volunteer for the Sea Otter Research & Conservation Program (SORAC) at the Monterey Bay Aquarium helped fuel her long-term interest in marine mammals. She now brings this interest and a great deal of dedication to ACS to help us grow and increase our impact as a national organization....with much work to do!

Cheryl Follows the WET Team for a Day

ACS Executive Director, Cheryl McCormick, recently had the opportunity to follow the Whale Entanglement Team (WET) out of the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories during a full day of training off of Monterey, California. The WET team is a very specialized response team sponsored by the Fisheries division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The team prepares to respond to and assist whales who may be entangled in fishing gear and debris.

Created By NOAA for Safe, Effective Response

NOAA realized the need for such teams not only as requests to help entangled animals became more prevalent, but also as untrained, unauthorized individuals went into the water to attempt assistance and put themselves in danger.

In June, 2003, a New Zealander who heard reports from local fishermen of an entangled whale went into the water and tried to cut the roped whale free. The whale's fluke inadvertently came down on him and killed him. Because of these dangers, NOAA stresses the use of specially trained responders, effective equipment that has evolved over time, and the use of the techniques that the teams are perfecting through training and experience.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) now oversees the training and operation of teams positioned in Alaska, California, Hawaii, and on the east coast. Training sessions like the one Cheryl observed include the examination of gear, training on operating procedures and protocols, and practice on the water in simulated conditions using their specialized equipment. Their goal is to be able to respond quickly in the safest possible manner when a report comes in. They are trained to respond as (and only as) a team, knowing that it is the coordinated use of their training and equipment that will bring about a safe, successful conclusion. So far, not a single WET team member has been injured during an authorized operation.

Response To a Call

Usually the report of an entangled animal comes from the public or from commercial operations on the water. While observers are encouraged to maintain a distance,

they are also strongly encouraged to keep the whale within sight if possible so that the team will know its location once assembled. One of the best pieces of initial information the observer can provide is the type of whale, which may give the rescuers an idea of its potential route if it is migrating. Response time and viability of rescue will depend on factors such as the weather, quality of information provided, ability to locate the whale (it's the most viable if an observer has stayed with the identified animal), and proximity of the gear and team members.

The Coast Guard often plays an important role, and representatives were there for the training session Cheryl observed in Monterey. They may act as a buffer between the public and the animal, will enforce the Marine Mammal Protection Act if the animal is harassed or endangered by onlookers, and can assist in other ways to ensure safety at the rescue scene.

NMFS also requests an expert "whale person" to verify assessment information. The nearest cetologist or marine mammal specialist will often be called upon to consult with the team.



This photo from NOAA shows a juvenile humpback whale off Maui that was disentangled in December, 2009, from hundreds of feet of plastic rope by a team from NOAA's Pacific Islands Regional Office and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources.

WET for a Day, cont.



LARGE WHALES IN DISTRESS

— Response and Reporting Card —

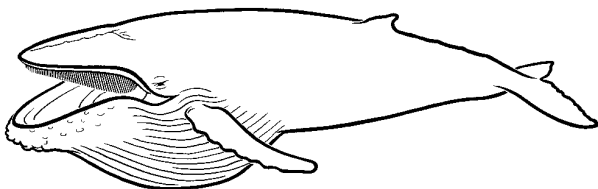
California W.E.T. (Whale Entanglement Team) is a group of marine mammal professionals and volunteers under the direction of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Office of Protected Resources. W.E.T. is tasked with responding to whales entangled in fishing gear and marine debris. These highly trained and experienced teams include marine biologists, veterinarians, mariners, and other volunteers coordinating with several governmental agencies including NMFS, NOAA Enforcement, US Coast Guard, and state agencies under the authority of the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program permit #932-1489.

Ocean users can play an important role in efforts to save whales in distress from pain, deformity, and death. Please report injured, entangled, and ship-struck whale concerns to the 24/7 W.E.T. hotline at (877) SOS-WHAlE (767-9425) or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF CH-16. Prompt reporting is the best way to help the distressed animal. Standing by until responders can arrive is also valuable. The back of this card prompts important information necessary to launch an appropriate response. The information provided may also help reduce incidents in the future.

Please be aware that it is sometimes not possible or appropriate to respond to every entangled or otherwise distressed marine mammal. Ship-struck animals may be monitored and assessed.

Safety first! Rescue attempts can be dangerous for would-be rescuers and the animal. Do not assist distressed marine mammals without guidance from authorities. Stay a safe distance away—100 yards minimum. Don't touch, feed, pursue, disturb, or otherwise approach marine mammals unless authorized to do so.

If possible, draw an approximation of the entanglement (below), indicating lines, objects, color, and distinguishing marks on the whale.



The California WET team has distributed a Response and Reporting card to likely observers, including a 24-hour reporting hotline they can call. The card provides instructions to help the reporter know what to do in this situation, a place to fill in critical reporting information (reverse side), and contact information to mobilize resources. If you would like a copy of this card, please contact the ACS national office at 310-548-6279. The ACS Monterey Bay chapter provided a grant to the WET team to help produce and distribute this card.

Specialized Equipment

Specialized knives that can be safely placed between the animal and the rope or line, and tracking devices that can be critical if the rescue goes on for a period of time are two of the equipment pieces demonstrated during the training. Crew helmet cameras and mini-underwater cameras on a pole designed by the Alaska Whale Foundation can be used to assess the entanglement and monitor the removal.

Lesson Learned - Contact the Experts

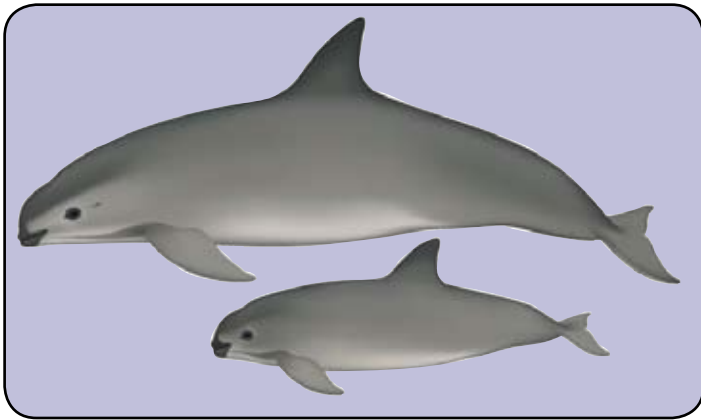
Cheryl came away from her day with a lot of admiration for the people and processes, and a clear message for our members. “The impressive, thorough training that WET team members and all sanctioned teams operating under the NOAA permit, the sharing of information among teams, and success stories that stress safety for all concerned are pointing toward a single, strong message. If you are a boater or can help distribute this information to people who may observe entanglements, please keep this information with you and help direct others to these experts sanctioned by NOAA.”

DO YOU HAVE A STUDENT IN YOUR LIFE WHO IS INTERESTED IN WHALES, DOLPHINS, AND PORPOISES?

Consider gifting an ACS membership. A big part of our mission has to do with passing on the caring and concern for cetaceans to our upcoming generations and establishing that link that leads to future conservation, understanding, and action. You can purchase a membership on our web site (through PayPal) at www.acsonline.org, use the form on the back of this newsletter, or call the ACS office at (310) 548-6279.

Viva Vaquita! Watch for the Upcoming *Whalewatcher*

by Tom Jefferson



In early 2010, the American Cetacean Society will publish a full-color special issue of the *Whalewatcher* journal dedicated to the World's most endangered species of marine mammal, the vaquita, and its porpoise relatives.

The vaquita is Critically Endangered, with only an estimated 125-150 remaining. It is the smallest of only six species of true porpoises, and is the only one that lives in warm waters of the eastern Pacific Ocean. It is found in a tiny area in the extreme northern Gulf of California, in Baja California, Mexico, just a few short hours drive south of the U.S./Mexico border.

In the last few decades, the small vaquita population has plummeted, as gillnets set for fish and shrimp kill more porpoises than are born annually. These nearly-invisible gillnets trap vaquitas, and they drown or suffocate. If rapid progress is not made, the vaquita may be extinct in a few short years. The very perilous situation of the vaquita has been recognized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Whaling Commission, Mexican Government, and United States Government.

There is now a major effort underway to prevent the vaquita from going the way of the baiji (Yangtze River dolphin), which was declared probably extinct after an extensive 2006 survey of its entire habitat failed to find any evidence of its survival. The Mexican and U.S. governments have joined forces to develop a vaquita acoustic monitoring program. They are establishing a gillnet buyout and alternative gear development program for the fishermen.

In addition, new research is revealing previously unknown secrets about these elusive animals, which will serve to focus conservation and management programs.

A new website, www.vivavaquita.org provides details on these initiatives.

But the vaquita is not alone in facing threats from human activities. All six species of porpoises (the cetacean family Phocoenidae) have problems with gillnets, and there is even a direct hunt for Dall's porpoise in Japan. Several populations of harbor, Dall's, finless, and Burmeister's porpoises are also facing local extinction. The next *Whalewatcher* will be a special issue focusing attention on these porpoises, with articles by leading scientists in the field (e.g., Masao Amano, Armando Jaramillo, Andrew Read, Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, Barbara Taylor, and John Wang). There will be a rare full-color photo gallery showing some of the first-ever high-quality photos of these species alive in the wild, and ACS Puget Sound Chapter President, Uko Gorter is preparing a set of illustrations showing the variation and beauty of these amazing creatures that most people never see!

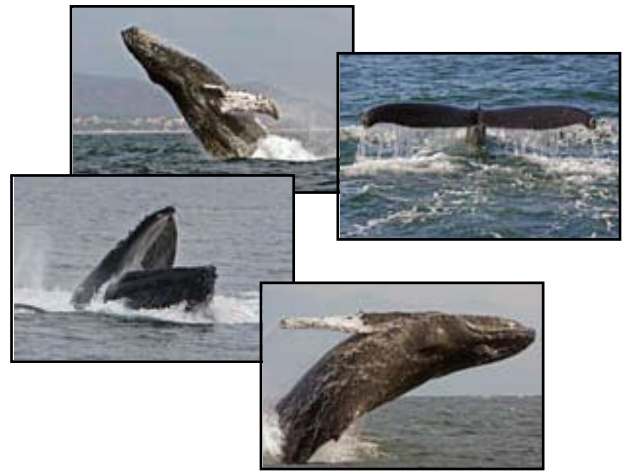
Watch for the special issue in early 2010, and in the meantime, log onto www.vivavaquita.org to get regular updates on the status of the vaquita and to find out what you can do help prevent the tragedy of another cetacean species going extinct in our lifetime.

SAVE THESE DATES!

*The next ACS biennial conference is planned for **November 12-14, 2010** in Monterey California. This conference will once again bring a variety of the latest science and research to ACS members and other interested, concerned individuals. We will be highlighting the small cetaceans, and bringing you very up-to-the-minute status and information about the little vaquita.*

New Greeting Cards Available On ACS Web Site

Talented photographer and ACS member, Daniel Ho, (MichaelDanielHo.com) has produced a beautiful set of blank greeting cards that feature his wonderful whale photos. The cards, in sets of eight (four different photos) are available for purchase at www.acsonline.org, and all proceeds go to ACS to help us with the many exciting projects we will launch in 2010.



New Baby Delights Northern Observers

Jami Nagel snapped this photo of a welcome new arrival on Saturday, October 10, 2009. As Jami describes, "The L-pod was heading south toward Admiralty Inlet and they were 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 at the first glimpse of the calf. I was confident that it was too small to be the calf born earlier in the year or late last year. "L113" was traveling very closely on the right side of L94 (Calypso) with L41 (Mega) just behind."



Photo © Jami Nagel, www.northwestwhalephotography.com

ACS Chapters Award Grants

ACS - Orange County awarded a grant to Morgan Richie for her efforts and innovations in informing small boaters about the safe protocols for whale watching - for the protection of both animals and boaters. Morgan printed up flyers with approved whale watching techniques, and reminders that could be attached to a boat windshield. Morgan and other college students have passed them out at likely user locations, such as boat ramps and yacht clubs. Once again, student innovation and dedication shine through for cetaceans and the ACS mission.

ACS - Monterey Bay recently awarded \$1000 grants to both Casey Clark, Moss Landing Marine Labs, and Paula Costa from La Paz, Baja California, Mexico. Casey is researching population structure and migratory behavior of humpback whales. Paula is studying genetic variation and the mating system of the blue whale from the gulf of California. Earlier this year the Monterey chapter funded vaquita research through a \$1000 grant to Dr. Tom Jefferson, and bottlenose dolphin studies in Monterey Bay with a \$1000 grant awarded to Dr. Daniela Maldini.

National Marine Fisheries Service Guidelines for Safe, Non-disruptive Whale Watching.

- *In General, a whale's normal behavior should not be interrupted. Such annoyance may cause a whale to change its direction rapidly, swim faster, or swim in an erratic pattern. Interrupting a whale's normal activity is a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.*
- *Vessels should not be operated at speeds faster than a whale or group of whales while paralleling them within 100 yards*
- *Vessels should be operated at a constant speed while paralleling or following whales within 100 yards*
- *Vessels should do nothing to cause a whale to change direction.*
- *Aircraft should not fly lower than 1,000 feet while within a horizontal distance of 100 yards from a whale.*

ACS Member and #1 Inspiration Recognized With Monument in Pt. Fermin Park

John Olguin is #1 citizen in the hearts of ACS - not only because he was one of our original members, but also because he has led a life of compassion and service that improves all who have the good fortune to meet him. The San Pedro Rotary Club has placed a monument in Pt. Fermin Park as an enduring recognition of John's "Citizen of the 20th Century" award.

During a long career with the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, John founded or helped establish/renew many of the marine life and civic projects and landmarks that give San Pedro its identity today, including the Los Angeles Maritime Museum, the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, Pt. Fermin Lighthouse, Pt. Fermin Marine Life Refuge, local whale watching programs, and currently the Thanksgiving Basket Program that provides and delivers over 1000 full holiday food baskets to needy families in the San Pedro area.

Although this honor is one of many recognizing John Olguin's amazing life and contributions, it is especially poignant that the monument to him for Citizen of the 20th Century was placed in Pt. Fermin Park, home of ACS headquarters and the lighthouse that John helped save as a much-loved San Pedro landmark.



John is generous with his knowledge, humor and warmth on land and sea. Photo © Alisa Schulman-Janiger

A Legacy of Conservation

The legacy of ACS will be the pivotal role our organization has played for over 40 years in protecting the world's "ambassadors of the seas." Part of your legacy can be in the support you provide toward this cause.

You don't need to be wealthy to make a gift that will have an impact on the future of whales, dolphins, and porpoises and their habitats. A charitable bequest to ACS in your will or living trust will serve as a powerful testimony to your conviction that this work is important to the health and biodiversity of our marine ecosystem.

I hope you'll join me in including ACS in your estate planning. I can't think of a better gift for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you so much for supporting the American Cetacean Society - together, we can make a difference!



Cheryl McCormick
Executive Director, ACS

All information about charitable bequests is held in the strictest confidence.

Your Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Street Address: _____ Phone: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

- Please send more information about.....
 - ___ How IRAs can be used for charitable gifts
 - ___ Charitable gift annuities
 - ___ Charitable lead and remainder trusts
 - ___ Remembering ACS in my will

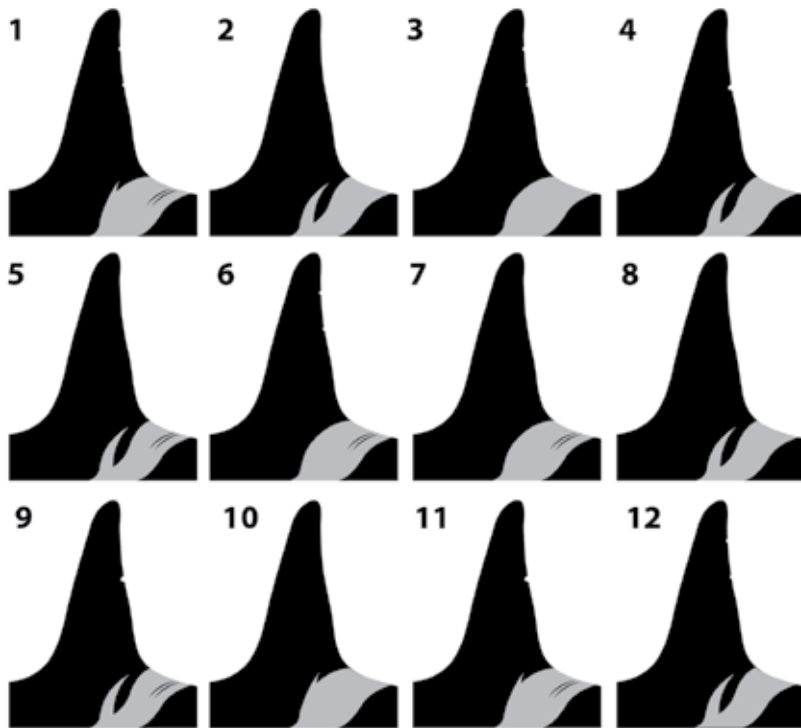
The American Cetacean Society welcomes gifts of stocks and securities. To arrange transfers, please contact your personal financial planner.

- I have established a charitable bequest to the American Cetacean Society. Please add my (our) name(s) to the Legacy of Conservation Display at ACS Headquarters and in the Spyhopper publications.

Help ACS protect whales, dolphins, porpoises and their habitats through public education, research grants, and conservation actions.

For Kids Who Love Whales & Dolphins

Whale researchers use visual markings on orcas to keep track of each one and learn more about where they are going and how they are doing. Can you find the matching pair of dorsal fins and saddle patches? Remember to check notches on the fins as well as coloring.



Answers: Numbers 2 and 8.

On Behalf of Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises...

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**Read more about our Board members
 at www.acsonline.org**



ACS member Becky Leveque spreads the word and demonstrates her love of whales on Halloween. Nine year old Becky has written and illustrated a little book about cetaceans that we proudly display at ACS Headquarters.

The American Cetacean Society (ACS) works to protect whales, dolphins, porpoises and their habitats through public education, research grants, and conservation actions.

FOR A MEMBERSHIP IN OR DONATION TO THE AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY:

Go online at www.acsonline.org, or send your check payable to ACS or credit card information with this form to:

American Cetacean Society National Office, P.O. Box 1391, San Pedro, CA. 90733-1391

Name: _____	For Annual Membership - Select Both Chapter & Level:	
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Card # _____ Expiration date: ___/___		Life \$750 ___
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