

Comparison of North Atlantic Right Whale Genetic and Photographic Data

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The photographic identification data in the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog and the genetic data housed at Trent University can be linked and compared to uncover errors in each and to discover previously undetected identifications. With funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, we have been undergoing a very detailed comparison of the two databases. A similar comparison was last done with data through 2006 and very low error rates of about 3% were discovered in both databases. Since that time, hundreds of samples and whales have been added to each database and additional information has been discovered to rectify particularly challenging discrepancies from the past. Here we report on a collaborative assessment of new data (over 300 samples and 222 cataloged whales new since 2006). Over 100 new errors were detected- the majority of them simple labeling or data collection errors. All errors will be categorized, the causes explained, and suggestions on how to minimize future errors provided. Finally, we will provide examples of genetics matches within the Catalog including an update on the identifications of dead whales.