

## **RIGHT WHALE NEWS**

The newsletter of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale and the Northeast Whale Implementation Team

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 3 AUGUST 1999

### **Massachusetts Environmental Trust, NMFS and Gray's Reef NMS Continue to Support *Right Whale News***

Thanks to the support of the Massachusetts Environmental Trust; the Office of Protected Species, National Marine Fisheries Service (Silver Spring); the Southeast Regional Office of the NMFS; and the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, *Right Whale News* will continue to be published and distributed free of charge to subscribers around the world.

The support from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust comes in the form of a three-year grant from their Fiscal Year 2000 Threatened and Endangered Species Program. The funds are derived primarily from three sources: environmental settlements initiated either by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or private environmental organizations, fees from the sale of license plates featuring the right whale and roseate tern, and private donations. For additional information on the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, contact Ms. Robbin Peach, Executive Director, MET, 33 Union Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Boston, MA 02108; tel. 617-727-0249.

The Office of Protected Species and the Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service have provided a matching grant for the continued publication of *Right Whale News*. The Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary supports the printing and mailing costs. Gray's Reef NMS also maintains a web site with the current issue, back issues and an index to volumes 1 ñ 5 (1994 ñ 1998); see the last item in this newsletter, page 9, for details on how to access the web site.

### **Please Help Expand Distribution List for *RWN***

Do you have friends or colleagues who should receive their own copies of *Right Whale News*? Please submit their names and addresses (or encourage them to do it) for free subscriptions. The support of the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, the National Marine Fisheries Service and Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary make this generous offer possible. Send subscription requests to the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, GA 30601 USA; e-mail: [gepi@ix.netcom.com](mailto:gepi@ix.netcom.com)

### **Early Report: Mandatory Ship Reporting System Up and Working**

Starting in July 1999, all commercial ships over 300 tons that enter right whale aggregation areas are required to report to a shore-based station. The program has two components: a reporting system operating off Massachusetts year round and one off Georgia and Florida each year from November 15 to April 15. Early reports indicate that the mandatory ship reporting system is up and working with only a few bugs, which are being worked out. For background information on this program, see the article by Greg Silber and Lindy Johnson of the NMFS in the February 1999 issue of *Right Whale News*.

## **Right Whale Rescued by International Team**

*By Dr. Moira W. Brown*

*Center for Coastal Studies and East Coast Ecosystems*

*Reprinted with permission from Coastwatch,*

*the newsletter for members of the Center for Coastal Studies*

Our right whale research has come full circle this year. In April, we had the unfortunate experience of carrying out a necropsy on a female right whale that was struck by a ship. This female, known as Staccato, was one of our more productive mothers with at least six calves to her credit since 1977. In June, we had the much more rewarding experience of disentangling right whale number 2753, a two year old female and Staccato's granddaughter. The event started with the unlikely sighting of a right whale in June in the Bay of Fundy, a right whale habitat area that is not usually populated with right whales until mid-July. Even more unlikely was the presence of most of the east coast's disentanglement experts on board the vessel that spotted the whale.

One of my goals since I got involved in right whale research in Canada 15 years ago has been to afford these highly endangered animals the same level of protection on both sides of the border. Right whales range from Florida (with Georgia the only known calving ground) to Nova Scotia. Although the whales know of no international boundaries, the countries of Canada and the United States that form the land borders along their range have very different legislation to protect these animals. In the United States, right whales are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. In 1994, three critical habitats were designated in the three known seasonal high-use habitat areas of Cape Cod Bay, Great South Channel and the southeastern U.S. along the coast of southern Georgia and northeast Florida). That same year in Canada, two conservation areas, the Bay of Fundy and Roseway Basin on the southern Scotian Shelf, were declared, but in the absence of protective legislation in Canada, these designations serve more to educate mariners about right whales than to provide any special protection.

It is believed that right whales are failing to recover in numbers because of human related mortality from collisions with ships and entanglement in fishing gear. For the last 12 years, the Center for Coastal Studies, the only institution along the east coast permitted by the National Marine Fisheries Service to disentangle large whales, has been hard at work developing protocols designed to respond quickly to an entangled whale and carry out direct action that improves the entangled whale's chances for survival. This program, directed by Senior Scientist David Mattila, has expanded over the last few years to provide assistance to right whales in all of their five known high-use habitat areas.

In 1999, the Canadian Government, through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), contracted

with the Center to assemble a cache of disentanglement equipment to be pre-staged near the Bay of Fundy, the primary right whale habitat from July through October for more than half of the known population of 350 whales. DFO also contracted with East Coast Ecosystems (ECE), a Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to research, conservation and education programs on right whales, to provide "first responder" disentanglement training sessions for Canadian researchers, volunteers mostly from the fishing communities and the Canadian Coast Guard in Freeport, Nova Scotia, and Grand Manan, New Brunswick. These sessions were designed to help our colleagues in various outposts respond to an entangled whale, assess the situation and attach a telemetry buoy to track the whale and buy some time to allow the primary team from the Center to arrive.

These sessions also coincided with ECE's release of a Whale Emergency Network designed to increase the number of reports on entangled whales and to educate fishermen about what they can do to help a whale in trouble. ECE called in experts from the Center for Coastal Studies, Stormy Mayo and Ed Lyman, and Canadian expert Jon Lien from Memorial University in Newfoundland to provide instruction at the training sessions in June.

On Saturday, June 5, we were on board the *Fundy Cruiser*, a whale watch vessel captained by Todd Sollows (one of our freshly-trained first responders in Nova Scotia), transiting the Bay of Fundy between the June 4 training session in Nova Scotia and the June 6 training session in New Brunswick. We were on the lookout for right whales, but didn't expect to see any this early in the season. But about half way across the bay, we saw one right whale and then a second one. When the third whale surfaced, I spotted something orange. I turned to Philip Hamilton, a colleague from the New England Aquarium, and said, "Am I seeing what I think I am seeing?" He checked with the binoculars and called to Stormy and Jon, "We have an entangled whale." We were all in disbelief until the whale surfaced again; there was no mistaking it this time. The whale was towing 3/8-inch fishing line with an orange buoy and metal pole (called a high flyer) attached.

No time was wasted. We had most of the disentanglement gear on board for the next training session, but had left the outboard motor in Nova Scotia. We radioed Todd Sollows' dad, Alger, and brother Darrin. They quickly responded, getting the necessary gear into their fishing boat and starting towards our location 16 miles away. The Canadian Coast Guard's Fast Rescue Craft, captained by Greg Peters, also heard our call. They were in the area and agreed to rendezvous with the fishing boat and speed the gear to us. While we were waiting for the rest of the gear to arrive, Stormy tossed a grapple from the *Fundy Cruiser* and attached another larger buoy to the gear on the whale so we could keep track of it more easily and maybe slow it down. Number 2753 was moving fast for a right whale, averaging 6-7 knots with all the gear in tow.

Once the Coast Guard arrived with the gear, Stormy, Ed and Todd launched the rescue inflatable to assess the whale's condition. They determined that the whale was towing several hundred feet of line behind the high flyer and original orange buoy; the line also entangled the mouth, caught up in the baleen. With the whale's fast swimming speed and late time of day, it was going to be hard to slow it down. The rescuers readied the flying cutting hook on the end of a long pole. After several attempts to get close to the whale, suddenly the opportunity was in front of them. They were within just a few feet of the whale and it was at the surface. They grasped the fishing line and were able to cut it just behind the head. The whale accelerated away with just a few feet of line trailing from either side of the mouth. In all likelihood it would be able to get rid of this in a short time.

We couldn't have asked for a more successful day. Nova Scotia's first responder, Todd Sollows, received hands-on experience the day after he was trained, and now entangled right whales will have a better chance of a fast response in the Bay of Fundy. A female right whale's chances for survival to

reproductive age were improved. And although Staccatoís reproductive life was cut short, her lineage will have an opportunity to continue through her granddaughter, number 2753.

### **Cape Cod Bay Critical Habitat Studies Continue**

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust's Fiscal Year 2000 Threatened and Endangered Species Program has provided funds for the second year of a three-year study by the Center for Coastal Studies on "right whale habitat use and the food web studies in the Cape Cod Bay Critical Habitat." This project aims to study the food web and zooplankton patch structure in the Cape Cod Bay Critical Habitat for the northern right whale. A product will be the first-ever food web description of that part of the Cape Cod Bay ecosystem that seasonally supports a significant part of the remaining population of right whales in the North Atlantic. The project is also designed to provide data needed for a description of the relationship between the oceanography of the area, the occurrence of primary and secondary planktonic producers, the structure of the food patches and the right whales' behavior and distribution. For further information, contact the project's principal investigator, Dr. Stormy Mayo, at the Center for Coastal Studies; tel. 508-487-3622.

### **The Canadian Recovery Plan: Reactions and Next Steps**

Reaction to the draft "Canadian Recovery Plan for the North Atlantic Right Whale" has been described by several observers as "mostly quiet." No comments were received from fishing groups, which may be a good sign of acceptance. The comments that were received will be incorporated into the final plan. After publication and distribution of the final plan, an important next step will be the formation of an implementation team. For more information on the plan, see the previous issue of *Right Whale News* or contact Jerry Conway at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, P. O. Box 550, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2S7, Canada; tel. 902-426-9609.

### **Take Reduction Team Negotiation Process Evaluated**

At the request of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Resolve, Inc. conducted an evaluation of the negotiating process used by five different Take Reduction Teams (TRT) including two teams that addressed right whales in their deliberations: the Atlantic Offshore Cetaceans TRT and the Atlantic Large Whale TRT. The evaluation included an extensive mail survey of the participants. The results of this evaluation have now been published (see Scientific Literature and Reports section, page 7, for citation). In summary, the findings indicated (1) most respondents felt the process is effective in resource management decision-making; (2) most respondents felt the negotiation process was fair; (3) most felt that there was adequate time for the negotiations; (4) most respondents were not satisfied with the results; and (5) most felt that there was insufficient data to support the negotiations. One respondent from the Atlantic Large Whale TRT summed up many of the responses by saying, "There were too many people trying to address too complex an issue in too little time." The NMFS is initiating actions to improve the process. In particular, NMFS is considering reducing the size of many of the TRTs to make discussions more effective while maintaining the balance of interests on each team.

## People on the Move

**Julie Hammond** is the new director of the Northern Right Whale Volunteer Sighting Network. A program of the Marine Resources Council, this network coordinates volunteers along the east coast of Florida. Julie may be reached at the MRC, P. O. Box 2892, Melbourne, FL 32902; e-mail: [council@megabits.net](mailto:council@megabits.net) **Herb Dhaliwal** is the new Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; as such, he oversees the operations of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the lead whale conservation agency in the country. Mr. Dhaliwal was formerly the Environment Minister. The new Environment Minister is **David Anderson**. Our Canadian friends anticipate that he will be a strong leader in the passage of endangered species legislation which would, among other things, provide additional legal support for Canada's right whale recovery effort.

## Instituto Sea Shepherd Brazil inaugurates Project Right Whale

A new conservation organization, the Instituto Sea Shepherd Brazil, was launched in June 1999 to work towards the preservation of all marine ecosystems of Brazil. The formation of the first organization of its kind in Brazil is underwritten by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (California). One of the Institute's first priorities will be Project Right Whale. In partnership with the International Wildlife Coalition, the Institute will develop specific projects in specific areas, such as responding to oiled or stranded animals, protecting natural areas, promoting the enforcement of national laws that protect marine ecosystems and conducting environmental education programs. The education programs will focus on those inner city young people who have never seen the ocean.

## North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium Annual Meeting Scheduled for October 21 and 22 in Boston

Everyone interested in the science of right whale conservation and biology is invited to attend the second annual meeting of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. The meeting will be held at the New England Aquarium Conference Center in Boston on October 21 and 22. The meeting will start at 9:00 AM on October 21 and end at 5:00 PM on October 22.

The tentative agenda calls for a business meeting in the morning of October 21 with scientific presentations that afternoon and the following day. Conference organizers anticipate that papers will be presented on a variety of topics including genetics, human-caused mortality and mitigation, review of 1999 surveys, population data and modeling. On the evening of October 22, there will be a world premier of a new BBC/Discovery film on right whales at a theatre in Boston.

Participants who wish to make a presentation at the meeting must submit a title and brief abstract to Marilyn Marx (see contact information below) no later than September 1. Pre-registration for non-presenters also is encouraged.

The registration fee for the meeting is \$25, which includes beverage breaks and two lunches. Financial support from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust will support the publication and distribution of the meeting proceedings, which will be distributed by the end of the year. All abstracts will be included in

the proceedings. If unable to attend the meeting but wish to receive the proceedings or to pre-register or submit a paper, or for more information on the meeting, contact Marilyn Marx, Consortium secretary, at the New England Aquarium, Central Wharf, Boston, MA 02110; tel. 617-973-6584; fax 617-723-9705; e-mail: [mmarx@neaq.org](mailto:mmarx@neaq.org)

For background information on the Consortium, see *Right Whale News* 6(1):10-11; February, 1999.

### **Scientific Literature and Reports**

Baker, C. S., N. J. Patenaude, J. L. Bannister, J. Robins and H. Kato. 1999. Differences in mtDNA lineages of right whales from the wintering grounds of southwest Australia and subarctic New Zealand. *Marine Biology* 134 (1):1-7.

Caswell, H., F. Fujiwara and S. Brault. 1999. Declining survival probability threatens the North Atlantic right whale. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 96 (6):3308-3313.

Chivers, C. J. 1998. The right whale to save. *Wildlife Conservation* 101 (1):12.

Chivers, C. J. 1998. Right whale alert. *Wildlife Conservation* 101 (5):14.

Clapham, P. J. 1999. Baleen whales: conservation issues and the status of the most endangered populations. *Mammal Review* 29 (1):35-60.

Clinton, William J. 1998. Statement on protecting the northern right whale. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 34 (17):696.

DeMaster, D. P. 1999. Priority list for marine mammal conservation. *Marine Mammal Society Newsletter* 7 (2):4.

DeMaster, D. P. 1999. Report on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 15 May 1999 Meeting of the Scientific Committee of the IWC. *Marine Mammal Society Newsletter* 7(2):1-3.

Hamilton, P. K., A. K. Knowlton, M. K. Marx and S. D. Kraus. In press. Age structure and longevity in North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) and their relation to reproduction. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

Honigman, S. S. and J. P. Quinn. 1998. Navy blue goes green. *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 124 (8):56-59.

Knight, J. 1999. The long goodbye. *New Scientist* 161 (2178):4.

Paine, A. L., M. G. Crane and K. Akers. 1999. Using GIS as a conservation tool in marine critical habitat areas: a relocation study of shipping lanes within the southern critical habitat of the northern right whale, *Eubalaena glacialis*. Paper presented at the 79th Annual Meeting of the American Society

of Mammalogists, Seattle, WA, June 22, 1999.

Perera, V. 1998. Sanctuary for the right whale. (Peninsula Valdez, Argentina) Whole Earth 92: 14-16.

Portway, V. A., C. M. Schaeff, P. B. Best, V. Rowntree, R. Payne, M. J. Moore and P. K. Hamilton. 1998. Genetic population structure of South Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena australis*). International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee unpublished meeting document, SC/23/SH23.

Resolve, Inc. 1999. The National Marine Fisheries Service Take Reduction Team Negotiation Process Evaluation. National Marine Fisheries Service, contract #50-DGNF-5-00164.

Rice, D. W. 1998. Marine mammals of the world. Systematics and distribution. Special Publication No. 4, The Society of Marine Mammalogy, Lawrence, KS.

Schaeff, C. M., P. B. Best, V. J. Rowntree, R. Payne, C. Jarvis and V. A. Portway. In press. Dorsal skin color patterns among southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*): Genetic basis and evolutionary significance. Journal of Heredity.

Schaeff, C. M., and P. K. Hamilton. 1999. Genetic basis and evolutionary significance of ventral skin color markings in North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*). Marine Mammal Science 15 (3):701-711.

Thewissen, J. G. M., ed. 1998. The emergence of whales: evolutionary patterns in the origin of Cetacea. Advances in Vertebrate Paleobiology. Plenum Press, NY. 447 pp.

Tormosov, D. D., 1998. Soviet catches of southern right whales, *Eubalaena australis*, 1951 ñ 1971: biological data and conservation implications. Biological Conservation 86 (2):185-197.

Wiley, D. N., and J. D. Goodyear. 1999. Movement, habitat use, and subsurface behavior of right whales, *Eubalaena glacialis*, in Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts based on multi-sensor telemetry. Final Report to the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. International Wildlife Coalition.

## Calendar of Events

September 1: Deadline for submitting titles and abstracts for presentation at the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium annual meeting on October 21-22. See article on page 5 for more information.

October 20: **Tentative** date for the next meeting of the Northeast Whale Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For further information, contact Dr. Sal Testaverde at NMFS, 978-281-9368, e-mail: [salvatore.testaverde@noaa.gov](mailto:salvatore.testaverde@noaa.gov)

October 21-22: North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium annual meeting, New England Aquarium Conference Center, Boston. For details, see article on page 5.

October 28 and, if needed, Oct. 29: Fall meeting of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. Location to be determined. For further information, contact

team chair Barb Zoodsma at 912-264-7218; e-mail: Barb\_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us

November 27 ñ 28: Pre-conference workshops, Society for Marine Mammalogy 13<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, Maui, Hawaii.

November 28 ñ December 3: Society for Marine Mammalogy 13<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference, Maui, Hawaii. For further information, contact the Society at their web site: <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~smm>

May 4 and, if needed, May 5, 2000: Spring meeting of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. Location to be determined. For further information, contact team chair Barb Zoodsma at 912-264-7218; e-mail: Barb\_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us

### ***Right Whale News***

*right Whale News* is the newsletter of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale and the Northeast Whale Implementation Team. The editor is Hans Neuhauser. The editorial board consists of Bill Brooks, Moe Brown, Scott Kraus, Mike Payne, Sigrid Sanders and Jerry Wallmeyer.

The Grayís Reef National Marine Sanctuary, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, the Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Northeast Whale Implementation Team have underwritten the costs of *Right Whale News*. Thanks to their support, *Right Whale News* is published quarterly and is distributed free of charge.

An **index** of the first five years of *Right Whale News* (1994-1998) has been prepared and is available along with current and **back issues** on the Internet, thanks to Alex Score and the Grayís Reef National Marine Sanctuary. There is a **new web site** for back issues of *Right Whale News*. The web site address is now: <http://www.graysreef.nos.noaa.gov/rightwhalenews.html>

**To subscribe** to *Right Whale News* or to submit news or articles for publication, contact the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, GA 30601, USA. Telephone 706-546-7507. Fax 706-613-7775. E-mail: [gepi@ix.netcom.com](mailto:gepi@ix.netcom.com)