

# RIGHT WHALE NEWS

The Newsletter of the Southeastern United States Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale and the Northeast Implementation Team

Volume 9 Number 1 February 2002

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## **Saving Two Female Right Whales a Year Could Reverse North Atlantic Decline**

After the end of commercial whaling, right whales in the western North Atlantic were thought to be slowly recovering in number. Since about 1990, however, evidence shows that this population is declining and may be functionally extinct. Collisions with ships, entanglement in fishing gear and changes in food availability due to climate fluctuations are suspected of contributing to this decline. A report published in the November 29 issue of *Nature* suggests that preventing the deaths of just two female right whales per year could allow the North Atlantic right whale population to increase to more than the replacement level. The report, "Demography of the endangered North Atlantic right whale," was written by Masami Fujiwara and Hal Caswell of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Unfortunately, 2001 was a year with a record high number of mortalities - seven known deaths and possibly two more. Four calves died, two as a result of ship collisions (off Assateague, Virginia, and Long Island, New York). Three adults are known to have died. Two were entangled (catalog #1102 - Churchill - and #1238). An unidentified adult carcass was sighted on Middle Bank, Nova Scotia on December 3, its cause of death unknown. In addition, an adult (#1114) may have died off southeast Nova Scotia in September and another adult (#2427), disentangled off New Hampshire and seen again in the Bay of Fundy in September, was given a poor prognosis for survival by New England Aquarium scientists.

Mason Weinrich, Director of the Whale Center of New England, noted at the February 6 meeting of the Northeast Implementation Team that preventing the deaths of two female right whales a year would be a good goal for both Northeast and Southeast Implementation teams.

## **Remnant Population of North Pacific Right Whales Found on Southeastern Bering Sea Shelf**

The eastern population of the North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*) is now believed to be the most endangered population of large whales in the world, so any report of a sighting is good news. Now, a remnant population has been discovered in the eastern North Pacific. At least five and possibly seven whales, the largest group seen since the mid 20th century, were observed feeding on the middle shelf of the southeastern Bering Sea (57.13°N, 162.84°W) in July 1997. A single whale was seen in the same area in June 1999.

Cynthia Tynan of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle and two colleagues at NOAA reported their observations in the November 30, 2001, issue of *Science* (see page 9 for citation). They found that the whales appeared to be feeding on lipid-rich copepods (*Calanus marshallae*) in relatively shallow water (50 to 80 meters deep). In contrast, during the intensive whaling era of the mid 20th century, North Pacific right whales were observed feeding on different prey (*Neocalanus cristatus*) in

deeper water (greater than 200 meters).

The authors caution that the remnant population of right whales is not necessarily at the center of the population's historical range. They may now be at the edge of a once broad distribution. The increase in concentrations of energy-rich prey in the middle shelf during the late 1990s may explain why the whales now occupy this part of the southeastern Bering Sea in the summer.

### **NMFS Publishes Seasonal Area Management and Dynamic Area Management Rules**

Under pressure from a federal court judge, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published an Interim Final Rule amending the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan and implementing the Seasonal Area Management (SAM) program in the January 9 issue of the *Federal Register*. The rule takes effect March 1. NMFS also published the Final Rule for the Dynamic Area Management (DAM) program, which took effect February 8. A Final Rule for gear modification was published in the January 10 *Federal Register*, effective February 11. The three rules are available at the NMFS Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan web site: [www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/](http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/)

Before the SAM Interim Final Rule becomes a Final Rule, the NMFS will publish a notice of intent in the *Federal Register* and a request for public comments, and will hold at least one or two scoping meetings. These meetings will be followed by the publication of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), additional public comments, a final EIS, and the final rule. The SAM Interim Final Rule will remain in effect until replaced by a Final Rule.

### **Ship Strike Recommendations Sent to NMFS**

Both the Southeast United States Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team and the Northeast Implementation Team have presented recommendations to NMFS on proposals to require re-routing of ships around whales, restrict speeds and mandate shipping lanes in right whale habitat. These and other proposals are contained in a report, "Recommended measures to reduce ship strikes of North Atlantic Right Whales," prepared by Bruce Russell and Amy Knowlton, co-chairs of the Ship Strike Committee of both teams.

The Southeast Implementation Team's recommendations were sent in September 2001. They are summarized in the November 2001 issue of *Right Whale News* (archived at: [www.graysreef.nos.noaa.gov/rightwhaleneews.html](http://www.graysreef.nos.noaa.gov/rightwhaleneews.html)). The Northeast Implementation Team sent their recommendations January 29. While the Northeast Implementation Team did not develop a consensus on the specific recommendations presented in the Russell report, a majority of both the team and the Technical Advisory Committee agreed that most of the recommended actions should be used to reduce the risk of ship strikes. A majority supported the basic concepts of mandatory routing and speed restrictions of ships through high-risk areas, and the use of dynamic management using these two techniques. Developing the details of specific speed and routing proposals would require an independent and detailed review. An economic analysis, while not directly reducing the risks of ship strikes, would help identify the actions that might provide the greatest biological benefit while causing the least economic harm. (For a copy of the team's letter, contact Tom French, chair, at 508-792-7270, or [tom.french@state.ma.us](mailto:tom.french@state.ma.us) )

The NMFS has not yet responded to the Russell report, the recommendations of the two Implementation Teams and other submitted comments. Representatives from the agency's headquarters in Silver Spring,

MD, will probably lead a team including representatives from both the Northeast and Southeast Regional Offices. Representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard already are being included in early discussions, since they will be involved if the implemented steps include regulation of ships.

### **NMFS 2002 Budget Approved**

The National Marine Fisheries Service budget for Fiscal Year 2002 was finally determined in November, having been a victim of Congressional debates that normally would have been resolved prior to the beginning of the fiscal year last October. The agency received an appropriation totaling \$6.8 million, of which \$1 million would go to the Northeast Consortium for research, \$1.5 million to state cooperative plans (e.g., Section 6 cooperative agreements), and \$4.3 million to NMFS for its headquarters, regional offices and fishery science centers. The allocations may change but the total amount is \$6.8 million.

In comparison, the NMFS budget for Fiscal Year 2001 totaled \$5 million, of which \$2.9 million went to the Northeast Consortium and \$2.1 million to NMFS northeast and southeast regional offices and fishery science centers.

### *Commentary*

#### **Coordination of Right Whale Research**

Congratulations are due to the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans and particularly to Jerry Conway for convening a meeting to discuss right whale research priorities and coordination in the Bay of Fundy this summer (see Calendar of Events, April 3 & 4, for details). This meeting should help reduce the frequency with which individual right whales in the Bay are buzzed by airplanes and boats, darted, sampled, tagged and otherwise disturbed by researchers. It also provides an opportunity for DFO and researchers to select the most benign methods & methods that have the least effect on the whales while still getting the job done. Similar coordination meetings are needed in U.S. waters as well.

NMFS, to its credit, is preparing an environmental assessment of the impacts of right whale research. These impacts are real and are worth looking at. Unfortunately, this review appears to be delaying the issuance of research permits to investigators outside the agency & but not to those within the agency.

*Hans Neuhauser*

#### **News from the Calving Ground**

As in past years, a number of groups are flying aerial surveys of right whale calving grounds. The University of North Carolina at Wilmington is flying from Savannah, Georgia, to the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (in some cases under contract with the Wildlife Trust) flies an inshore survey from north of Brunswick to Savannah, as well as a series of offshore surveys. The New England Aquarium flies the Early Warning System (EWS) area from north

of Brunswick to Jacksonville Beach. The Florida Marine Research Institute flies from Jacksonville Beach to approximately Ormond Beach, and occasionally farther south. The level of survey effort varies from near-daily flights in the EWS area, to two days a week in other areas, to more occasional flights to the south. In addition, associated scientists at Woods Hole have taken a number of flights in a blimp. In sighting animals from shore, the volunteer sighting network coordinated by the Marine Resources Council is active, and has trained and organized several hundred spotters.

The Navy in Jacksonville continues to operate its website again this year ([www.facsfacjax.navy.mil](http://www.facsfacjax.navy.mil)), and provides a central location for recording sightings and forwarding EWS information to mariners and other parties.

As of February 15, 12 and possibly 13 calves have been reported, and it is thought there may be another one or two in the area. In addition, at least six individual adults have been sighted, with a few more likely. Chris Slay of the New England Aquarium reports an unusually high number of cows returning to these grounds accompanied by their yearlings. Julie Albert of the Marine Resources Council reports a number of sightings at the extreme southern end of what is considered the normal range for the species, with sightings from Vero Beach and Sebastian Inlet.

Monitoring and studies in the waters of the southeastern United States are key to understanding the population and its reproductive success. We await results from the coming weeks, and a compilation of findings from the various investigators.

## Whale Conservation Fund Update

The National Whale Conservation Fund announced a call for pre-proposals to be reviewed in early January. The focus of this call included projects that directly contribute to the conservation and recovery of endangered whales in U.S. waters. The Fund received 10 pre-proposals, requesting approximately \$300,000 in funds. Nine of these applicants were invited to submit a full proposal for an early February deadline. Those proposals are currently undergoing external review before being presented to the National Whale Conservation Fund Advisory Council in April for selection. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation hopes to award between \$100,000 and \$200,000 in funding for quality projects in whale conservation and recovery in early May.

Although development activities for the Fund have been slower than hoped for in the first quarter after the tragedy of September 11th, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation plans to redouble its efforts to secure sponsors for the Fund throughout the second quarter. In the mean time, the National Whale Conservation Fund continues its efforts in outreach and education, such as the Fund website to be launched this spring.

## People

A sharp-eyed reader of the November 2001 issue of *Right Whale News* noted that **Anna Moscrop** of the International Fund for Animal Welfare had been omitted from the list of board members of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. Her term expires in 2003. **Jackie Ciano**, formerly with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Right Whale Conservation Program, is now with the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, MA. **John Logan** of Irving Oil Company, Canada, was elected to the Technical Advisory Committee of the Northeast Implementation Team on February 6.

## Right Whale Papers Presented at 14th Biennial Conference

A number of papers on right whales were presented at the 14th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, held in Vancouver, Canada, November 28-December 3. The conference was sponsored by the Society of Marine Mammalogy and hosted by the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Center. Listed below are the senior authors and the titles of their papers. For a complete citation, and for a list of all the papers presented, refer to the Society's web site for the conference:

[www.smmconference.org](http://www.smmconference.org)

Baumgartner, M. F. et al. Understanding the relationship between North Atlantic right whale movements and habitat characteristics from satellite-monitored radio tag data: A novel approach.

Bessinger, M. et al. Using food resources as a tool for the management of fishing and shipping activities in the critical habitat of the North Atlantic right whale.

Bowman, R. et al. Habitat management lessons from a satellite-tracked right whale.

Brault, S. et al. Stable isotopic analysis of North Atlantic right whale baleen.

Clapham, P. J. et al. Defining triggers for temporary area closures to protect North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) from entanglements.

Fairfield, C. P. Simulation model of North Atlantic right whale birth rate.

Kenney, R. D. et al. North Atlantic right whale calving success: Linkages to the North Atlantic oscillation, oceanographic patterns and prey availability.

Mate, B. et al. Summer feeding season movements and fall migration of North Atlantic right whales from satellite-monitored radio tags.

Merrick, R. L. et al. Value added research: Offshore aerial surveys for right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) in the northwest Atlantic Ocean, 1999-2000.

Pace, R. Mark-recapture analysis provides evidence for temporary emigration from the Bay of Fundy feeding ground by North Atlantic right whales.

Seger, J. et al. What can the phylogenetic and population-genetic relationships of right whale cyamids tell us about the history and behavior of right whales?

## IWC Publishes *Right Whales: Worldwide Status*

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has published *Right Whales: Worldwide Status* as Special Issue number 2 of the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*. The long-awaited volume includes reports and species studies presented at both the Workshop on the Comprehensive Assessment of Right Whales: A Worldwide Comparison (March 19-25, 1998, in Cape Town, South Africa), and at a follow-up Workshop on Status and Trends of Western North Atlantic Right Whales (October 24-27, 1999, in Woods Hole, Massachusetts).

The IWC is currently offering *Right Whales: Worldwide Status* at an introductory price of \$60.00 (US). For ordering information, consult the IWC web page: [www.iwcoffice.org](http://www.iwcoffice.org)

Editors of the volume are P. B. Best of the South African Museum, J. L. Bannister of the Western Australian Museum, R. L. Brownell, Jr. of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center and G. P. Donovan of the IWC.

The special issue includes reports on the Cape Town and Woods Hole workshops and their recommendations, which were subsequently endorsed by the IWC. These recommendations include an emphasis on the importance of maintaining research and data analysis on right whale status and biological parameters. Serious concern is expressed about the status of western North Atlantic right whales, the need for research leading directly to a reduction of non-natural mortality such as ship strikes and entanglements in fishing gear, and the absolute urgency of reducing non-natural mortality in the stock to zero. Serious concern also is expressed over the status of eastern North Pacific right whales and the lack of information on threats.

The issue also includes an introduction by the editors and the following papers:

### **Southern right whales**

#### *Australia*

Burnell, S. R. Aspects of the reproductive biology, movements and site fidelity of right whales off Australia.

Bannister, J. Status of southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) off Australia.

#### *New Zealand*

Patenaude, N. J. and C. S. Baker. Population status and habitat use of southern right whales in the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands of New Zealand.

Stewart, R. and B. Todd. A note on observations of southern right whales at Campbell Island, New Zealand.

Patenaude, N. J., B. Todd and R. Stewart. A note on movements of southern right whales between the sub-Antarctic Auckland and Campbell Islands, New Zealand.

#### *Argentina*

Cooke, J. G., V. J. Rowntree and R. S. Payne. Estimates of demographic parameters for southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) observed off Peninsula Valdes, Argentina.

Rowntree, V. J., R. S. Payne and D. M. Schell. Changing patterns of habitat use by southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) on their nursery ground at Peninsula Valdes, Argentina, and in their long range movements.

Rivarola, M., C. Campagna and A. Tagliorette. Demand-driven commercial whalewatching in Peninsula Valdes (Patagonia): Conservation and implications for right whales.

#### *Brazil*

De Oliveira Santos, M. C., S. Siciliano, S. P. De Souza and J. L. Altmayer Pizzorno. Occurrence of

southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) along southeastern Brazil.

Greig, A. B., E. R. Secchi, A. N. Zerbini and L. Dalla Rosa. Stranding events of southern right whales, *Eubalaena australis*, in southern Brazil.

#### *South Africa*

Best, P. B., A. Brandao and D. S. Butterworth. Demographic parameters of southern right whales off South Africa.

Best, P. B., V. M. Peddemors, V. G. Cockcroft and N. Rice. Mortalities of right whales and related anthropogenic factors in South African waters, 1963-1998.

#### *Madagascar*

Rosenbaum, H. C., Y. Razafindrakoto, J. Vahoavy and C. Pomilla. A note on recent sightings of southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) along the east coast of Madagascar.

#### *Namibia*

Roux, J. P., P. B. Best and P. E. Stander. Sightings of southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) in Namibian waters, 1971-1999.

### **North Atlantic right whales**

Reeves, R. R. Overview of catch history, historic abundance and distribution of right whales in the western North Atlantic and in Cintra Bay, West Africa.

Knowlton, A. R., and S. D. Kraus. Mortality and serious injury of northern right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) in the western North Atlantic Ocean.

Kenney, R. D. Anomalous 1992 spring and summer right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) distributions in the Gulf of Maine.

Mayo, C. A., B. H. Letcher and S. Scott. Zooplankton filtering efficiency of the baleen of a North Atlantic right whale, *Eubalaena glacialis*.

Kraus, S. D., P. K. Hamilton, R. D. Kenney, A. R. Knowlton and C. K. Slay. Reproductive parameters of the North Atlantic right whale.

Kraus, S. D. and J. J. Hatch. Mating strategies in the North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*).

Brown, M. W., S. Brault, P. K. Hamilton, R. D. Kenney, A. R. Knowlton, M. K. Marx, C. A. Mayo, C. K. Slay and S. D. Kraus. Sighting heterogeneity of right whales in the western North Atlantic: 1980-1992.

Kenney, R. D., C. A. Mayo and H. E. Winn. Migration and foraging strategies at varying spacial scales in western North Atlantic right whales.

### **North Pacific right whales**

Scarff, J. E. Preliminary estimates of whaling-induced mortality in the 19th century North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*) fishery, adjusting for struck-but-lost whales and non-American whaling.

Brownell, R. L., Jr., P. J. Clapham, T. Miyashita and T. Kasuya. Conservation status of North Pacific right whales.

Leduc, R. G., W. L. Perryman, J. W. Gilpatrick, Jr., J. Hyde, C. Stinchcomb, J. V. Carretta and R. L. Brownell, Jr. A note on recent surveys for right whales in the southeastern Bering Sea.

## Techniques

Hiby, L. and P. Lovell. A note on an automated system for matching the callosity patterns on aerial photographs of southern right whales.

Burnell, S. R. and D. Shanahan. A note on a prototype system for simple computer-assisted matching of individually identified southern right whales, *Eubalaena australis*.

Moore, M. J., C. A. Miller, M. S. Morss, R. Arthur, W. A. Lange, K. G. Prada, M. K. Marx and E. A. Frey. Ultrasonic measurement of blubber thickness in right whales.

## Scientific Literature and Reports

Best, P. B., J. L. Bannister, R. L. Brownell, Jr., and G. P. Donovan, editors. 2001. Right Whales: Worldwide Status. Journal of Cetacean Research and Management, Special Issue 2. International Whaling Commission.

Fujiwara, M. and H. Caswell. 2001. Demography of the endangered North Atlantic right whale. Nature, vol. 414, 537-541 (November 29, 2001).

Tynan, C. T., D. P. DeMaster and W. T. Peterson. 2001. Endangered right whales on the southeastern Bering Sea shelf. Science, vol. 294, 1894 (November 30, 2001).

## Calendar of Events

March 1: The Interim Final Rule for Seasonal Area Management goes into effect. See article on page 2.

March 5: Meeting of the Habitat Committee of the Northeast Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For further information, contact Romona Haebler at 401-782-3095 or [Haebler.Romona@epa.gov](mailto:Haebler.Romona@epa.gov)

March 19-21: **Cancellation:** The meeting of the Canadian North Atlantic Right Whale Implementation Team tentatively scheduled for these dates has been cancelled.

April 3-4: Bay of Fundy Right Whale Research Coordination Meeting, St. Andrews, New Brunswick. This session is for people planning to conduct research in the Bay of Fundy this summer. Participants will have an opportunity to meet and discuss priorities. For further information and for a copy of the agenda, contact Jerry Conway at the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Ocean: 902-426-6947 or [conwayj@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:conwayj@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca)



April 4-7: Florida Marine Mammal Health Conference, University of Florida Hotel and Conference Center, Gainesville, Florida. The conference seeks to promote the health and well-being of the four principal species of marine mammals found in Florida waters: manatees, bottlenose dolphins, pygmy sperm whales and North Atlantic right whales. For further information, contact Dr. Iske L. Vandeveld Larkin at 352-392-4700, ext. 3866 or e-mail: [Larkin@mail.vetmed.ufl.edu](mailto:Larkin@mail.vetmed.ufl.edu)

May 9--10: Next meeting of the Southeast U.S. Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For further information, contact team chair Barb Zoodsma at 912-264-7218 or [Barb\\_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:Barb_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us)

June 5: Next meeting of the Northeast Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For further information, contact Dr. Sal Testaverde at [Salvatore.Testaverde@noaa.gov](mailto:Salvatore.Testaverde@noaa.gov)

October 17-18: Fall meeting of the Southeast U.S. Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For further information, contact team chair Barb Zoodsma at 912-264-7218 or [Barb\\_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:Barb_Zoodsma@mail.dnr.state.ga.us)

October 29-30: Annual meeting of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. Location to be determined. For further information, contact Marilyn Marx at: [mmarx@neaq.org](mailto:mmarx@neaq.org)

## ***Right Whale News***

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

The Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, the Southeast Regional Office of NOAA Fisheries, the Northeast Implementation Team and the Savannah Presbytery's M. K. Pentecost Ecology Trust Fund ([www.savannahpresbytery.org](http://www.savannahpresbytery.org)) underwrite the costs of *Right Whale News*. Thanks to their support, *Right Whale News* is published quarterly and is distributed free of charge.

The **current issue** of *Right Whale News* is now available on line at a web site maintained by the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute: [www.GEPInstitute.com](http://www.GEPInstitute.com) An **index** of the first five years of *Right Whale News* (1994-1998) is available along with current and **back issues** on the Internet, thanks to Alex Score and Marcy Lee of the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. The web site address is: <http://www.graysreef.nos.noaa.gov/rightwhalenews.html>

**To subscribe** to *Right Whale News* or to submit news, articles or commentary 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)

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