

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

*An independent forum for right whale conservation and recovery,
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The North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium's Annual Meeting



The opening address was given by Scott Kraus on the morning of Tuesday, 25 October 2022.

After a two-year hiatus, the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium held an in-person annual meeting. It was held on October 25th and 26th at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Actually, it was a hybrid meeting—there were about 150 in-person attendees and another 125 on-line. The format was different than usual. Presentations were of three types: 1) pre-recorded and viewable on-line in advance of the meeting, 2) pre-recorded and viewed at the meeting, and 3) live. The meeting itself, broken into topical sessions as is customary, was mostly devoted to presenter panels with concise summary presentations followed by a question-and-answer period.

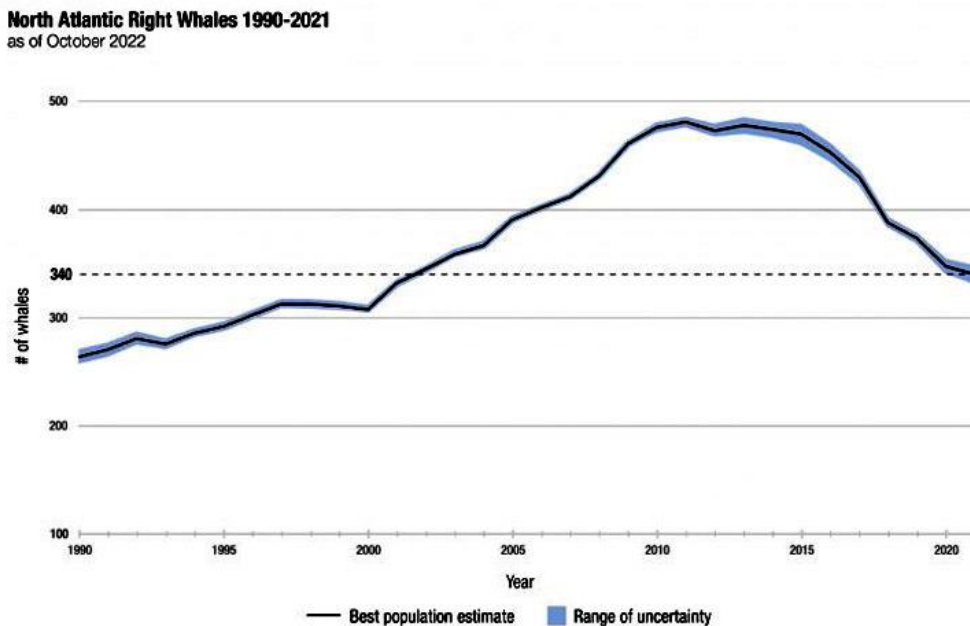


The meeting format was somewhat different this year. Many on-line presentations were viewed in advance with a panel Q&A at the meeting. In this example, the session entitled Anthropogenic Event Monitoring and Management—Vessel Strikes, had summary presentations and Q&A with panel members (left to right): Caroline Good, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service; Kathryn Lebow, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Chantal Bois, Transport Canada. Lance Garrison, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service (on the screen) participated remotely. Amy Knowlton, session moderator, is on the far left.

Heather Pettis, New England Aquarium, describes that the meeting site, with corresponding documents and presentations, is available to participants through the end of the year. Presentations that have permission to post publicly will be available via the NARWC websites and linked through YouTube channels @NARWC. Migrating the 2020-2021 videos to the channel is in progress, and will include 2022 once permissions are obtained.

The 2021 Right Whale Report Card

Of particular interest at each Consortium meeting is the Right Whale Report Card. As part of the keynote talk, Scott Kraus reported the population estimate for 2021 was 340 ± 7 . The population is experiencing a continuing decline. Other sobering numbers include restatement of the fact that only about 36% of the actual mortality is reported. The distributional unknowns continue. While 130–150 right whales appear in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, some 200 are elsewhere. It is estimated that there are 55–60 entanglements per year, with six serious. With respect to human efforts, Kraus described that “the Take Reduction Team/Plan has had no detectable influence on right whale conservation.”



Assessments of the North Atlantic right whale population 1990-2021. Annual assessments are shown by a point estimate along with associated error that represents 95% of the posterior probability. The model estimates the number of whales alive at the start of each year plus any new whales entered during that year (see Pace et al., 2017, Ecology and Evolution 7: 8730-8741) for model methodology). The estimate for 2021 was 340 ± 7 . Data from the North Atlantic Right Whale Identification Catalog as of August 30, 2022. The report card in its entirety will be posted in January at www.narwc.org.

Right Whale Festival 2022

Julie Albert, Contributing Editor

More than 12,000 people were in attendance at the 2022 Right Whale Festival in Fernandina Beach, Florida on November 5th and 6th. The Festival is a celebration of the return of North Atlantic right whales to their Southeast U.S. calving ground and this year's theme was “Preparing the Ocean Nursery.” The two-day event brings together the scientific community, conservationists, ocean-themed vendors, artists, live bands, food trucks, and more to educate citizens on how to help protect right whales while in their winter critical habitat area. The Mayor of Fernandina Beach, Mike Lednovich, proclaimed at the festival that November was Right Whale Month.



The 2022 Right Whale Festival, 5–6 November 2022, in Fernandina Beach, Florida. The mother-calf right whale mosaic was a highlight. Photo: J. Smith.

Festival attendees enjoyed a silent auction, beach clean-up, kayak tours, beach yoga, live music, demonstrations and education from state and federal agencies (including law enforcement) and non-profit organizations. Research and law enforcement boats were on-hand for people to see, and things like ropeless fishing gear, whale bones, baleen, whale lice, copepods, and biopsy equipment were on-hand for people to learn about. A community art project was displayed that



Inflatable right whale provided by the Clearwater Marine Aquarium.

consisted of a life-size mother and calf right whale mosaic made of more than 1,000 pieces of right whale artwork made by children from across the country. The Hitplay Productions documentary *Last of the Right Whales* was shown for a large outdoor crowd on the first night. In continuation of Right Whale Month, the festival and the Amelia Island Whale Ambassadors hosted two volunteer training classes in the weeks following the festival for anyone wanting to learn more and how to help the Volunteer Sighting Network in Florida. Barb Zoodsma was honored for her years of work as NOAA's Fisheries' North Atlantic Right Whale Recovery Program Coordinator. She was gifted a large hand-carved right whale wall plaque designed by Florida artist Bruce Shugart.

Canadian lobster fisherman Adam Kenney traveled from Nova Scotia to Florida to help educate people about how ropeless fishing works and the benefits he has had from using it for the last seven years. This was the first Right Whale Festival in Florida that had a commercial lobster fisherman present and speaking of the benefits of going ropeless. While the lobster fishery and right whales in the northeast U.S. and Canada can be a contentious topic, he was surprised about how many people in the Southeast U.S. are not aware of the uphill battle the fishery is facing trying to protect right whales and to make their fishery a sustainable one. He loved being able to bridge the Northeast with the Southeast, and plans to return for next year's festival.

The 2022 Right Whale Festival was dedicated to the memory of Jessica Koelsch Bibza (National Wildlife Foundation, St. Petersburg, Florida, an elite triathlete, an ambassador for coastal conservation, and also an advocate for manatees and sea turtles), who was a driving force behind the creation of this festival and recently passed; a tribute bike ride was held in her honor. This was the 13th year of this family-friendly event (canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic), and the third year in Fernandina Beach, Florida. Prior to the move, the festival was in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, for ten years.

Early Sightings in the Southeastern U.S.

A hint of the unfolding whale season has been reported. On November 22nd, a pair of females was sighted by the North Carolina aerial survey team: Catalog #2605, *Smoke*, 26 years old, and #3503 *Caterpillar*, 7 years old. There have also been a handful of singles. On December 7th, the first mother-calf pair, #1208, *Medusa*, was sighted off Georgia. Then on the next day, the 8th, another mother-calf pair, #3370, *Archipelago*, was also sighted off Georgia. *Medusa* is at least 42 years old, and this is her 7th calf. The *Medusa* sightings go back to 1981. She's been around for more than four decades. No doubt, she has stories to tell. *Archipelago* is at least 20 years old, and this is her 3rd calf. *Archipelago* has been sighted in the SEUS area in several previous seasons.



On November 22nd, a pair of female right whales was sighted by the North Carolina aerial survey team—team members are: from left to right, observers, Renee LaGarenne and Jess McCoppin, North Carolina Team Lead: Meghan Bradley, and Project Manager/Georgia Team Lead: Melanie White. Photo: Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute.

People and Changes

Barb Zoodsma, (Southeast Regional Office, National Marine Fisheries Service), Southeast U.S. Large Whale Conservation Program Coordinator, and liaison with the Southeast U.S. Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team, is retiring. She began the position on 2 December 2002. Her last day will be 23 December 2022.

Calendar

23 October Ropeless meeting; 24–25 October 2023, North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium annual meeting—tentatively— in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Literature and Reports

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- Kowarski, K.A., S.B. Martin, E.E. Maxner, C.B. Lawrence, J.J.-Y. Delarue, and J.L. Miksis-Olds. 2022. Cetacean acoustic occurrence on the US Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf from 2017 to 2020. *Marine Mammal Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mms.12962>
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Right Whale News

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Jim Hain, Editor of *Right Whale News*, is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists.