



Humpbacks & High-Rises “Whale Tails” 2014

Season Summary

What a year. So much happened that I struggle to put it all together. But let's get started with our summary. We are still using Facebook to gather our forces and volunteers until there is a better tool. Here are some numbers: 1136 Likes, 112 blog posts with the highest number of one post at 19 000 people. Under the HHR Research Group 107 volunteers registered to support us during 2014. We have expanded to a third whale watch operator and with over 30 volunteers undertaking boat based surveys our survey hours increased once again. Our total number of fluke images now counts over 600 spanning 4 years. With the donation of images and our own photography we have around 20 000 images capturing whale activity on the Gold Coast for 2014. We have made the transition from pen and paper to Ipad based data collection and our new WhaleTrails app for iPhones was sent out to the world at the start of the whale season used by people around the world. HHR supported the work of a number of students as part of their research. Laura Torre from New Zealand has finished her second season of surveys and Chiara Sullivan finished with a first class Honours on whale acoustics.

The whale season started early with significant sightings from 15th May onwards but finished early in the last week of October with nearshore northern migration but offshore southern migration.

Headlines were made about the Federal governments shutting down marine mammal research funding, the International Court stopping Japanese whaling in the Antarctic and the infamous entanglement of 6 whales in shark nets on the coast of Queensland.



Belinga 21.07. A Minke whale drowning on the Gold Coast in shark nets.

Media

Our impact on the Gold Coast community and beyond also depends on media coverage. Once again we have been featured in a number of articles including the Gold Coast Sun, Gold Coast Bulletin, Liquify, Suburban Living and Holistic Magazine, Redland Times, Bayside Bulletin, Mashable, Daily Telegraph, 4BC and ABC Radio, Channel 9, NBN News, and ABC 1. A great article in the Liquify Magazine can be viewed here <http://joom.ag/707b> and a summary of the whale season on ABC Radio is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/abc-gold-coast/whale-review-131014-olaf-meynecke-on-drive>



A presentation on marine mammal research on the Gold Coast was given at the Coastal Twilight Series organized by GCCM on the 12th November. HHR members also attended Science Week at Sea World on the 23rd August with a stall, spoke out at the Spit Rally on the 7th December, had a stall at the Broadwater rally and Green Week.

And on the research side our HHR president helped organising a Symposium on Marine Megafauna together with Michelle Blewitt and Elanore Bruce. The symposium was held in Canberra in conjunction with AMSA 51 in July. Talks were given by HHR members Josh Reinke and Olaf Meynecke about their marine mammal research.



Other notes: We had response letters from Gold Cost City Council and the Environment Minister in regards to our online petition to stop whale entanglements but no response by the Minister for Fisheries. The petition therefore remains ongoing and we are joining forces with other groups. So far history has proven right to the people who argued for science.

Yes, the earth is round after all and shark nets kill marine life but don't

save people.
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-21/call-to-pull-out-shark-nets-on-queenslands-gold-coast/5910466>

Events

Our annual Ocean awareness event at Kurrawa Surfclub was held on the 6th Sept. With only 30 people attending we had much less participants than in previous years. Nevertheless, it was a fun night. We had live music by Timmy Rickard Music, Jake Fox Music, amazing costumes and received great support from local businesses to run the event. Talks were given by Shannon Klein on jellyfish blooms, Laura Torre on whaling history and by Olaf Meynecke on HHR research.



HHR Ocean Event on the 6th September at Kurrawa Surfclub with a presentation by Shannon Klein.



Our stand at the Spit Rally to speak out for urban marine mammals on the 7th December.



Our Science Week stall on the 23rd August.

Our annual general meeting was held on 16th December with the HHR board being elected for another term. The minutes will be available to members shortly.

Whale Snot and Whale Cam

A new research project started this year collecting whale blow samples to learn more about respiratory infections and pathogens in humpback whales. Using a drone and a petri dish this was an all-exciting undertaking and the first of its kind in Australia.

Crittercam from NatGeo was once again not available for deployment with a shortage of units and the new units still in trial. However, one day we will be out again with Crittercam.



White Whale News

So close and yet so far. Migaloo came by North Straddie on the 24th June and was seen only a few hundred

meters from Point Lookout. You can read the story here:

<http://www.baysidebulletin.com.au/story/2372327/migaloo-visits-straddie/?cs=212>

He then continued his northern migration but was not sighted during his southern migration. We suspect that he was further offshore like the rest of whales. He usually passes the Gold Coast in the last week of September. Mini Migaloo a new white whale that was sighted in the Whitsundays two years ago has not been seen or positively identified again.

Whale strandings and incidents

This year's strandings of humpback whales on the east coast of Australia were in the range of the previous year. One stranding made international headlines when being washed up on the Gold Coast. Over 2 days of rescue attempts finally resulted in the release of the animal back to sea in the first week of July.

At least another 12 humpback whales were being reported in the news as stranded on the east coast of Australia. A tragic ship strike occurred in August in Moreton Bay killing at least one rare southern right whale and leaving one severely injured. As expected the number of shark net entanglements increased in 2014 with 6 whales having to be freed from nets, including one fatal incident and on top a number of reports were made on short entanglements where the animal freed itself.

Once again a sperm whale was washed up dead this time on Moreton Island in the last week of May and seven stranded in the first week of December in WA.



Humpback whale carcass washed up on Main Beach on the 9th November.

HHR action

Hhr volunteers spoke to whale watching tourist, informed them about the importance of research and protection. We also handed out flyers, gave presentations at schools, were given talks and informing the community at rallies and events. We also submitted a number of articles for publication in international journals.

HHR outlook 2015

We continue. And more. New projects are already on the horizon and shaping up quickly. The HHR research expedition lead by Olaf in New Zealand is certainly an upcoming highlight. Investigating common dolphin abundance in relation to ocean currents. Other projects include assessing the impacts for swimming with whales and dolphins in the Broadwater. The next year will hopefully see monthly newsletters send to our supporters and an online, near real time update of our daily surveys. As whale entanglements are continuing with no effort by the government to change this, we will also ramp up our “Stop whale entanglement” campaign. We had response letters from Gold Cost City Council and the Environment Minister in regards to our online petition to stop whale

entanglements but no response by the Minister for Fisheries. The petition therefore remains ongoing and we are joining forces with other groups. So far history has proven right to the people who argued for science.

Yes, the earth is round after all and shark nets kill marine life but don't save people.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-21/call-to-pull-out-shark-nets-on-queenslands-gold-coast/5910466>

HHR acknowledgement

HHR relies on the interest, support and good will of people who feel that protecting marine mammals and learning about them is important. In particular we like to thank the following organisations for direct contribution to research:

Whale Watching Gold Coast, Whales in Paradise, Spirit of Gold Coast Whale Watching, Griffith Centre for Coastal Management, SEQ Catchment, Manta Lodge, Onset, Rustic Pathways. Many thanks to our dedicated volunteers, students and researchers. Our HHR community will continue to protect and study urban marine mammals in 2015. Honest, independent and for the well being of our natural wonders and a sustainable whale watching industry. Our ongoing work entirely depends on donation. Please, consider donating for whale research and protection at

<http://www.everydayhero.com.au/event/whaleresearch>

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a great start into the New Year!

