



Humpbacks & High-Rises

Whale Tails 2019/4

This is our quarterly newsletter bringing you a summary of the urban marine mammal world. Facts, Stories and Events. Join us on the largest mammal migration on earth!

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We love our humpback whales. The most acrobatic whale species of them all. Creating sound waves under water for communication. The big splash.

Season Summary and 2019 Highlights

by Olaf Meynecke

It is this time of the year. Time for our season summary. It gives me great pleasure to summarise all the activities HHR volunteers were involved in. We are entering our 10th year and I can proudly say that our impact has been steadily growing - providing .

In 2019 we organised two Beach Clean ups with over 60 people, 6 training workshops with 115 people participating, 2 Movie screenings for 61 people and organised 4 Research Expeditions with 24 people attending. In addition we had stalls at various events in south-east Queensland. Research deriving from our long term monitoring program was presented at the AMSA conference in Fremantle in July, the World Whale conference in Hervey Bay in October and the World Marine Mammal Conference in Barcelona in December. Supported research was published in October from Laura Torre-Williams and made headlines in media around the country. The biggest HHR event so far was the first Gold Coast Whale Festival held end of August. Hundreds of people came to celebrate our whales and dedicated volunteer groups. The 2020 Whale Festival will be held on the 22nd August and I am excited to see this event becoming bigger and stronger in 2020.

During the 2019 whale season we surveyed 767 humpback whales and sighted 670 (336 – 2018) dolphins, 9 (14 – 2018) turtles during 133 survey days covering 400

survey hours with 57 volunteers. Over 7000 photos of whales were taken for identification and we are now having a 4000 whale strong database collected over 900 survey days and 2700 survey hours.

A new partnership with the [Whales and Climate Research Program](#) will allow for our data to be used in an international research project.

Our AGM was held on the 6th December at Griffith University. The following [council members](#) have been elected to continue to lead HHR. CEO Olaf Meynecke, President Sarah McCulloch, Treasurer Jane McCulloch, Secretary Jasmine Rasmussen, Social Media Campaigner Viv Kalaas, Campaigner Caitlin Adams and the new role of Education Officer Teleri Eww. We like to thank previous councillors in their role of Social Media Campaigner Holly Richmond and Campaigner Teleri for their outstanding services.

We like to thank our whale watch industry partners namely Whales in Paradise, SeaWorld Cruises, Spirit Whale Watch, Sea The Gold Coast, Sun Goddess Whale Watching and Sunshine Coast Afloat for their ongoing support and for letting us on their vessels for surveys.

Our team wishes everyone a wonderful Christmas break and a great start into 2020. May the whales be plenty.

Olaf Meynecke
CEO HHR



A pod of Orcas in Ballina chasing humpback whales. A rare sighting on the east

[Orcas hunting humpback whales on the east coast](#)

by Viv Kalaas

Every year during the east coast migration Humpback Whales visit the warm waters of Queensland and New South Wales to give birth to their calves, adding 10 percent to the east coast Humpback population. Humpback calves feed on their rich mother's milk during the migration to build up enough body fat to survive the cold waters of the Southern Ocean. Some calves however may not survive the journey south to feeding grounds in Antarctica due to threats such as predators, vessel strikes and illness.

One well known predator of Humpback calves are Killer Whales or Orca. Sightings of killer whales on the Gold Coast are rare and due to a lack of information not much is known about the numbers of Killer Whales on the Australian east coast according to the Australian Orca Database. The concentration of sightings on the east coast occur in Victoria and Tasmania. Infrequent and occasional sightings of orcas have occurred in Queensland and New South Wales. Some of these sightings include South Stradbroke Island in 2014, a pod of 8-10 in 2017 off the coast of Southport and a pod 5-6 off Byron Bay in 2017.

In October this year a rare and extraordinary event was witnessed just off the coast of Ballina. During a whale watching cruise with Out of the Blue Adventures passengers came across a Humpback mother and her calf when a large pod of 30 or more orcas approached the whales. The pod of Orcas successfully separated the mother and male escort from the calf. Much to the shock of the passengers the orcas quickly killed and consumed the calf.

According to the research group, Killer Whales Australia none of the individuals from this pod were immediately recognisable from the East Coast Catalogue of Killer Whales, although further analysis is pending. Orcas can move over vast distances and travel at speeds of up to 20km/hr. A well-known female orca named Split Fin that frequents areas near Tasmania had recently been sighted 970km away from her previous location in just 16 days. As humpback numbers increase, predators such as orcas are responding to the greater food supply.



[World Whale Conference](#)

by Reggie de Santis

This year HHR members had the pleasure to attend the World Whale Conference which was held in Hervey Bay from 8th -11th October, 2019. The conference brought together all stakeholders in cetacean welfare and conservation including the scientific, NGO and ocean advocate communities, educators, artists, students, travel and tourism industry, and the general public. The event was attended by more than 100 conservationists, scientists and whale watch operators from around the globe. Laura Torre-Williams presented her research about East Australian humpback whales calving on the northern migration: evidence from the Gold Coast Bay, Queensland, Australia supported by HHR. Olaf Meynecke, Sarah McCulloch, presented the research about Investigating migration patterns of the humpback whale population D and E1 using citizen science: "Migratory cetacean species like humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are difficult to monitor due to their vast home ranges. Acquiring extensive datasets on these animals can be expensive and time consuming. Here we explore the contemporary data sets on Humpback whales available for the east and west coast of Australia, their consistency and the potential role of these data sets in conservation and management for the species. The collection methods of data were ranging from traditional land-based surveys to visual surveys; from opportunistic platforms to aerial surveys. Six data sets were selected for further analyses based on their spatial and temporal cover, as well as accuracy. Results showed seasonal patterns with different cohorts travelling along the coastlines to their respective breeding and resting grounds. An estimation of calves sighted provided an indication of the role and importance of breeding and resting areas. The findings were supported by previous research. In combination with individual identifications, the spatial and temporal variation of migratory patterns can be better defined; benefiting conservation management and the whale watch industry."

We were also pleased to be part of the heritage nomination. The World Cetacean Alliance (WCA) awarded the accreditation in recognition of the region's responsible and sustainable whale watching practices. Hervey Bay has been crowned the world's first Whale Heritage Site. The historic decision was announced in Hervey Bay during the annual World Whale Conference.



Once in a life time encounter. A juvenile whale shark checks out one of the whale watch boats during a HHR survey.

Whale, shark or whale shark

by Taryn-lee Perrior

My second shift with humpbacks and high rises- whale, shark or whale shark?

On the 24th of October I was excited to attend the SeaWorld whale watch cruise in hopes of surveying whale behaviour, although I could not have anticipated what was yet to come.

On this morning I boarded the boat and anxiously waited for take-off. Slowly departing through the sea way, I prepared the survey sheets. The moment we left the sea way a pod of roughly 30 rare humpback dolphins greeted us, following the boat as we journeyed further out to sea, playing and jumping around the front of the boats wave break as we all admired the pink dolphin species.

As we said goodbye to the playful pod, it was not long after a mother humpback whale and her calf was spotted by seeing their fresh blows breaking the water surface. Recording their behaviour, I couldn't help but to admire the grace of there creatures.

The captain decided to move on and find another whale pod, so off we went, further out to sea. Suddenly a person on board shouted "SHARK". It caught the captain's attention, so he turned the boat around and headed toward the distant figure. One of the crew members tried to get to the highest point to help guide the direction of the boat while predicting and informing us it looks much like a tiger shark. I personally have never seen a tiger shark, so I ran to the side of the boat hoping to get a good

look. As we got closer it seems we also caught the creature's eye as it changed direction and at this point, we were heading for each other, head on. The boat came to a stop as the figure came closer and closer. I started to see the head and I was speechless. It seemed to be getting wider and wider. Is this the biggest tiger shark ever seen? I thought to myself but didn't dare say out loud as I could feel the nervous anticipation on the boat. My eyes couldn't focus more intensely, waiting to see more than just a shape. Then I see SPOTTTS! Tiger sharks don't have spots. As the thought crossed my mind (surely this isn't what I think it is?) the crew member screamed whale shark.

My heart dropped with amazement as the whale shark came to meet the boat right in front of where I was, putting its head on the boat slowly doing a full perimeter check not once but twice. Everyone got to see this beautiful spotted animal as close as it could possibly get.

Once the whale shark decided to leave, we encountered two other humpback whale pods. Its safe to say the day greatly exceeded my expectations and to see the behaviour of 3 beautiful species in their natural habitat was a dream come true.



Recent public relations activities

by Sharyn Carnahan

In the last few weeks we have run stalls at the NaturallyGC festival at Robina and the UQ Moreton Bay Research Station Open Day on North Stradbroke Island. Both days we had excellent volunteers answering the many questions that the patrons had regarding whales. A lot of people wanted to know how to become volunteers for next year. There was a lot of interaction with the children that came up to the stall and stickers were handed out to them. Both events were a great opportunity to interact with the public and give information about our great little but ever-growing band of volunteers. Thank you to those volunteers who gave up their time to run both the stalls, your commitment to the whales is commendable.

We also held a movie screening and ocean talks at Paperbark Café in Burleigh Heads. Dr Olaf gave an overview on the research that came out of this year's whale season which provided some interesting data and answered some interesting questions that

were thrown at him by the audience. "Life in the Blue" which is a documentary about all that is happening under the ocean was then screened and was well received by the 27 people who attended. Thank you to Josh from [Paperbark Cafe](#) for allowing us to use their business and for providing some great snacks. Thank you to the volunteers who helped set up and clean up and the general public who came along and supported the function. We will be holding more of these events in 2020. As 2019 comes to a close we say a huge thank you to all our volunteers who have attended any of the events that we held throughout the year to help spread the whale word.



Award winners

by Olaf Meynecke

During our AGM on the 6th December we were also giving our our awards for some of the most outstanding volunteers and their services. The HHR Hall of Fame became three new members. The Best Campaigner Award was given to Reggie de Santis for her support with the Gold Coast Whale Festival and running parts of our social media activities. The Best Researcher Award went to Jill Corey who dedicated many days and weeks to our fluke catalogue and the Best Volunteer Award went to Jo McGrory for her dedication to marine mammal surveys, reliability and accurate data entry. Congratulations to our award winners!



Upcoming Events & volunteer opportunities

You can help making a difference and be part of our growing group of whale and dolphin researchers.

- Beach clean up as part of Clean up Australia Day on the 1st March 2020 at Burleigh Heads. More details [here](#).
- [Ocean Film Festival](#) 11th and 12th March 2020
- Join our dedicated volunteer team and sign up for the 2020 whale season with the first training seminar held end of May 2020. Send us an e-mail to science@hhr.org.au to register.
- Want to be part of the core team and get the real deal? Join our dedicated team that runs HHR at our monthly general meetings. Held at the end of each month. Next meeting February 2020.
- Become an intern with HHR. We call for interns for the 2020 whale season.
- Sign our petition: You can stop whale entanglements by supporting our [Stop whale entanglement letter](#) and request alternative methods to be put in place and developed. Do you know a business on the Gold Coast that would like to endorse the open letter? Please, send us an [e-mail](#).
- Join our 3-day research expeditions on the Gold Coast in 2020. Bookings and details [here](#).

HHR relies on the interest, support and good will of people who feel that protecting marine mammals and learning about them is important. We are honest, independent and stand 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](#).

HELP URBAN MARINE MAMMALS

You can support whale protection and research in south-east Queensland; a small donation goes a long way.

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