



# Humpbacks & High-Rises

Whale Tails 2021/4

Hi

I am excited to share with you some of our 2021 highlights.

Wait, is it already the end of 2021? I will never know what happened to 2020 and 2021 did not want to be much different.

Despite the many challenges, we managed to collect data on hundreds of whales, held events, stalls, beach clean-ups, published and helped protect our whales. For the first time, whale surveys were undertaken from Byron Bay to Noosa covering all of southeast Queensland. Our data has been used in studies on humpback whale behaviour. It was also added to the Whales & Climate international database on humpback whale sightings for the research on climate change impacts.

This year was our 10-year anniversary and like every year we started with our first events in early March with the Clean Up Australia Day beach clean up and a stall at the Ocean Film Festival. This was followed by a whale workshop for kids in April, a stall at the National Day of Action and the Naturally Gold Coast Festival.

Many more events followed with some of the biggest events being a clean up at the Spit with Volunteering Gold Coast in June (over 100 participants) and our Whale Festival end of August at Burleigh Heads. Overall hundreds of volunteers participated in our activities.

Our AGM was held at the end of November with the election of the new HHR board members and assigning important roles that allow us to continue in 2022. Without the dedicated support of our volunteers, sponsors and participating whale watch operators, we would not have achieved such great outcomes for our marine mammals in the past decade. I am proud to see HHR continue to thrive and be able to work with so many wonderful people for a good cause.

Our team wishes everyone a wonderful Christmas break and a great start into 2022.

May the whales be plenty and the ocean healthy!

**Olaf Meynecke**  
CEO HHR



The volunteer faces of 2021

## 2021 Whale Season Summary

by Karren Pass

Now the whale season is over, and we are in our off-season, it is time to reflect more on the past whale season and focus on everything we have achieved this year.

In 2021 we had a total of 127 members: 94 on the Gold Coast and 33 on the Sunshine Coast. And we are proud to say that most of these members were actively volunteering during the season! Our season ran from 1 June to 30 October during which time our dedicated volunteers conducted a total of 116 Boat Based Surveys (BBS, in Sunshine Coast and in Gold Coast), 54 Land Based Surveys (LBS, in Gold Coast), and we ran 3-weekend research expeditions.

During our boat-based surveys and research expeditions, we surveyed a total of 282 pods with 734 humpback whales and recorded their behaviours, swim speed, direction and took 8 000 photographs. They also spotted 408 dolphins (mainly common and bottlenose), 10 hammerhead sharks, and 14 turtles (4 loggerheads, 4 green, 6 unknown). Our LBS volunteers on the Gold Coast surveyed 285 pods of whales which were a total of 523 humpback whales from Tumgum lookout at Burleigh Hill. While running whale surveys, the team also enjoyed the interactions with the public and the opportunities to educate the public on whales and whale behaviours! And, they were able to enjoy the local wildlife in Burleigh Heads National Park.

Not only did our volunteers collect data, but we also have other people who support us and have contributed substantially by recording behavioural data of their whale sightings this year: our friends from Wild Byron (142 submissions), Tangalooma Whale Watch (15 submissions), Oceanrider (12 submissions), Mermaid Spirit/SunGoddess (98 submissions) and Sea the Gold Coast (5 submissions) have recorded a total of 725 whales for us! We are extremely grateful for all of your contributions!

Not only do we want to thank you and our dedicated volunteers for their amazing work, but we also want to acknowledge our partners that allow our volunteers to go on their boats. Without them, the last 10 years of marine mammal monitoring would simply not have been possible!

Our plans for the next few months you ask?

Well, we will continue the data-crunching! In the next few months, it is time to look at the trends over the last decade since our CEO Olaf Meynecke started this citizen-science program to observe and monitor our whales! Not only that, this off-season also gives us the opportunity to look at all the photos we have taken this season, and compare them with previous years. Do we have any re-sightings? Or maybe we surveyed the same whale in the Sunshine Coast and in the Gold Coast this year?

We are excited to find out more, share the news with you, and we hope to see you all again in 2022!



Our new elected HHR board members from left to right: Viv, Holly, Jo, Olaf, Sarah and Jane

## End of Year Celebrations and HHR AGM

by Sarah McCulloch

At the end of November we celebrated the close of a successful whale season with our Annual General Meeting and end of year celebration. We ventured aboard the Spirit of Gold Coast vessel for a floating bar cruise that took us along the Broadwater at sunset; a very beautiful trip! The afternoon started with the official AGM business and re-electing some committee members and introducing some new ones.

In 2022 we will continue with Dr Olaf as our Chief Scientist and CEO, Jo McGroy as our Secretary, Jane McCulloch as our Treasurer, Viv Kai as our Social Media Campaigner, and myself as President. We also introduced Holly Summers as our new Education Officer, and Safaira Osborn as our new Events Coordinator.

We take the opportunity to thank Caitlin Adams as our outgoing Events Coordinator for her amazing work, and look forward to still having her assistance with future whale festivals, and we would like to thank Teleri Ewe, our outgoing Education Officer, for all of her amazing work! The evening also involved handing out awards to some of our top volunteers from the 2021 season. Congratulations to Josh Rohl for receiving the HHR Surveyor Award, Zoe Carnahan for receiving the HHR Researcher Award, and Holly Summers for receiving the HHR Campaigner Award.

It's been a great year with some very exciting research taking place, and we can't wait until the 2022 whale season!



## Naturally GC Wildlife Fest and Upcoming Events in Early 2022

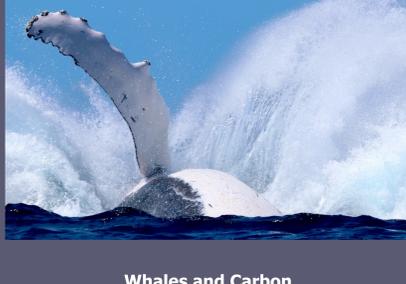
By Holly Summers

This year, we at Humpbacks and High-Rises were fortunate enough to spread our love of whales and the message of research and conservation at the Naturally GC Wildlife Festival. It was an incredible event where small and large organisations alike gathered to share the amazing work they do to protect our local wildlife with the wider community.

Both the young and old filled Helensvale library where faces were painted, small sea creatures were gently touched, orphaned bats and flying foxes were adored and reptiles were admired! We, personally, were asked many questions regarding the work we do in the waters of Southeast Queensland for our annual, awe-inspiring, oceanic visitors. It was moving to see the interest our community has in the preservation of wildlife, both big and small, and we are very pleased to be expecting some familiar faces at our volunteering inductions in 2022.

For the upcoming year, we of course intend to continue to play an active role in our community, and one of the many ways we will achieve this is through hosting another beach clean up in honour of Clean Up Australia Day! In 2019, it was calculated that around 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic debris are currently in our oceans, and this number is only increasing. While inspiring work is taking place to remove pollution from our oceans and reduce waste at the root, our coastlines are still lined with rubbish. Join us at our beach clean up to make sure all the rubbish we gather will never end up in our oceans and in the bellies of our marine life! The date of which will be posted on our social media!

Last, but not least, join us next year at the Ocean Film Festival to see some incredible underwater footage and conservation efforts that will most definitely leave you in awe! We will be in attendance with interactive activities, merchandise, and lots of information about the marine life we love! In addition, remember to keep an eye out for us at upcoming events in the New Year, including National Day of Action and future Naturally GC Festivals!



## Whales and Carbon

By Chantelle Young

What do you think of when you hear the words carbon capture or greenhouse gasses? Do you immediately think of protecting and planting more trees? Though tree planting is a popular method for sequestering carbon, capturing carbon from the air and storing it deep in the ground requires complex and expensive technologies that largely don't exist yet. Now, what comes to mind when you think about whales? Do you think of the exhilarating beautiful songs of the humpback whale? Or maybe you are reminded of the astounding breaches and pee slaps you saw once while whale watching? In the ocean, the great whales play a much more important role - in fact, when it comes to saving the planet, one whale is worth a lot.

The carbon capturing potential of whales is surprising - each great whale could roughly capture 33 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>! Great whales absorb and accumulate this carbon in their bodies throughout their life (an average of 60 years), which is then carried down to the ocean floor when they die. In comparison, a mature tree only absorbs up to 48 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. In addition to storing carbon in their bodies, the great whales contribute to carbon capturing by supporting microscopic creatures called Phytoplankton.

Phytoplankton contribute at least 50% of all oxygen to the atmosphere, while also capturing an estimated 40% of all CO<sub>2</sub> produced. During feeding and migrations, great whales defecate close to the surface of the ocean, releasing nutrients and minerals in large plumes - these nitrogen rich plumes are exactly what phytoplankton need to grow. If great whale populations were to increase, Phytoplankton activity could increase theoretically, even a 1% increase in Phytoplankton activity would capture so much CO<sub>2</sub> it would be the equivalent of 2 billion mature trees suddenly appearing!

Based on these statistics alone, a surprisingly simple and affordable strategy for capturing more carbon from the atmosphere comes to mind: increase global whale populations. If great whale populations were to return to pre-whaling numbers, estimates suggest that 1.7 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> would be captured annually. The strategy of supporting and increasing whale populations is not only hugely beneficial to life in the ocean, but also to life on land - including our own.



### Adopt a Whale

There is no better way to show your support for the wild.

You can adopt a whale for yourself or someone else.

You will receive a certificate of your adoption, and you will support our research focusing on humpback whales.

[Adopt a Whale](#)

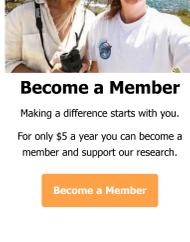


### Support The Research

If you want to support our research, you can simply donate.

All of the money supports the research and the whales!

[Donate](#)



### Become a Member

Making a difference starts with you.

For only \$5 a year you can become a member and support our research.

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