



WHALEBLITZ REPORT

AUGUST 01, 2022

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Ocean Wise's Whales Initiative

Ocean Wise is a Canadian not-for-profit dedicated to restoring and protecting our oceans. With a focus on evidence-based solutions and everyday actions, we're empowering millions of people to turn the tide on climate change, overfishing and pollution. Built on more than 60 years of conservation, our successes are proof that amazing things are possible when we work together.

The Whales Initiative is a [conservation initiative within Ocean Wise](#), established in the mid 1980's. We conduct applied research on cetacean threats and threat mitigation, population and distribution trends, acoustic behavior, population genetics and photogrammetric monitoring of the health of at-risk cetacean populations. Our main goal is to develop and implement conservation tools which deliver critical information about whale and environmental health to decision makers in real time to protect and recover whale populations.

BC Cetacean Sightings Network

Ocean Wise's British Columbia (BC) Cetacean Sightings Network (BCCSN) is one of Canada's most enduring and successful citizen science programs. For over 20 years, the BCCSN has engaged in education and outreach throughout BC to encourage coastal citizens to become marine stewards by reporting their cetacean and sea turtle sightings in support of conservation-based research.



The BCCSN manages an extensive, historic database on cetacean and sea turtle occurrence records, which to date contains over 300,000 verified sighting reports from approximately 7,300 observers. Ocean Wise provides subsets of these data to over 10 conservation-based research projects annually. This database contains a treasure trove of pertinent ecological information, including species assemblages, distribution, behavior, group composition and individual identities (for cetaceans). Spatially and temporally, this data covers all 203 of the current Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Canadian Pacific Ocean, and throughout the majority of the 127 MPAs in

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Washington State, with dates spanning from the 1950s to present day. Data continues to be added to this database via Ocean Wise's [WhaleReport app](#), which directly informs the [WhaleReport Alert System \(WRAS\)](#) to inform large ships such as ferries, tankers, and freighters of cetacean presence and reduce the risk of ship strikes and disturbance. This amalgamation of sighting reports is an important means of identifying and protecting critical habitat, highlighting areas of high risk, reducing anthropogenic threats to at-risk species, and ultimately contributing to the designation of new MPAs. Between April 1, 2021 and 31 March, 2022 alone, the BCCSN received a total of 6,954 cetacean sightings (**Figures 1 and 2**).

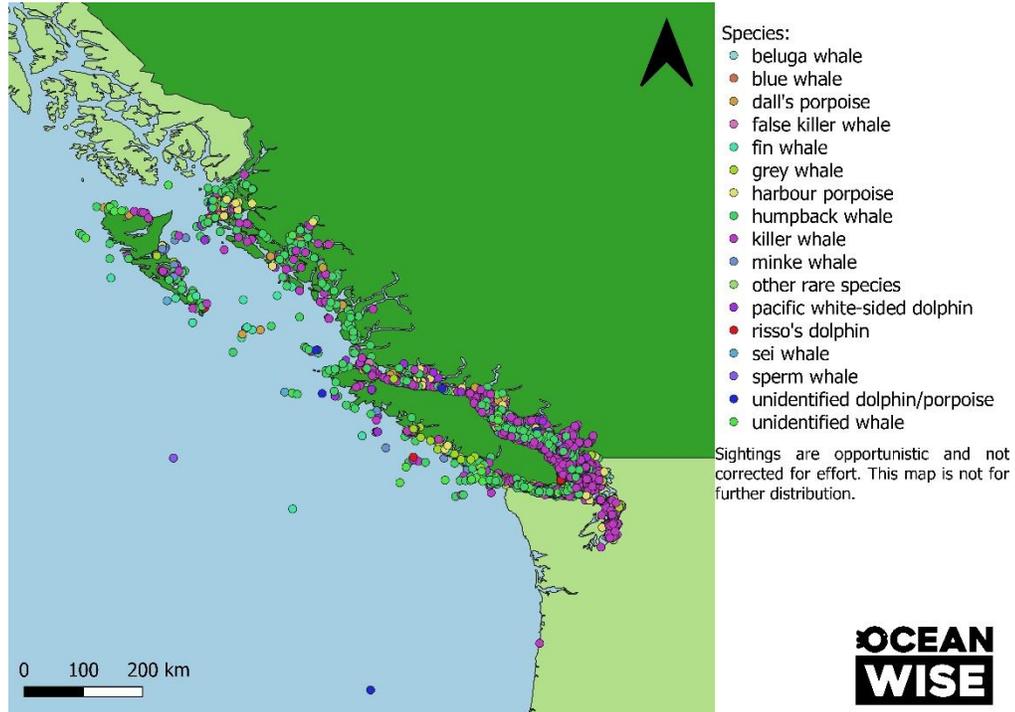


Figure 1. Sightings reported to the BCCSN between April 2021 and end of March 2022.

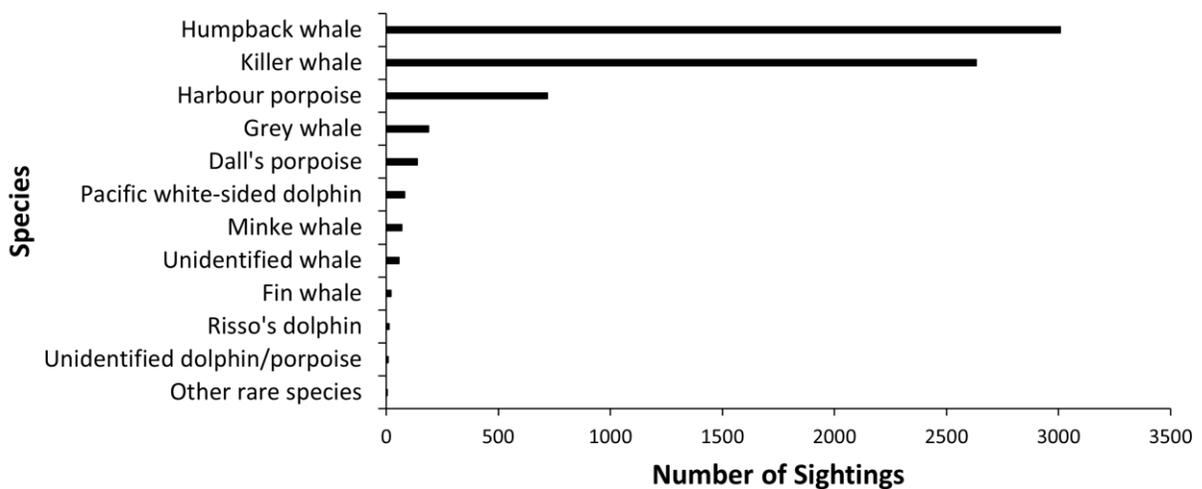


Figure 2. BCCSN sightings breakdown per species (April 2021 to end of March 2022).



WHALEBLITZ

Join a land-based
Ocean Wise
WhaleBlitz near you!

OCEAN
WISE

Land-based whale watching is an inclusive and non-invasive way to collect important information about the whales in our waters.

BioBlitzes for Conservation

In BC, many cetacean (whale, dolphin, and porpoise) species are endangered or threatened as a result of human activity. Collecting information on species presence/absence, behavior and individual identifications are vital for the protection and recovery of our iconic megafauna. Often, citizen scientists are invited to get involved in collecting presence/absence data by joining a BioBlitz, an event that focuses on identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time.

Starting in 2022, the BCCSN launched a Bioblitz of its own, an annual event known as WhaleBlitz. These cetacean BioBlitzes consist of a series of community events hosted by Ocean Wise staff and partners at land-based [Whale Trail](#) sites situated around the BC coast. WhaleBlitz watches are held between July 14-17 in celebration of [World Orca Day](#) and the anniversary of Northern Resident Killer Whale [A73 'Springer'](#) being returned to her pod after rescue and rehabilitation (July 14th). Each event aims to provide community members with an opportunity to participate in land-based whale watching, gain species ID skills, and learn about whale conservation. In addition, hosts and participants are equipped with tips and tricks for viewing and identifying cetaceans and given information on marine mammal [Be Whale Wise](#) guidelines and regulations.

Cetacean sightings recorded during these watches will be reported in real time through the Ocean Wise WhaleReport app, thus alerting professional mariners to the presence of whales and allowing them to take actions to prevent ship strikes and disturbance.



Killer whales as viewed from land on Saturna Island. Credit: Danielle Ahrens/Ocean Wise.



2022 WHALEBLITZ EVENTS

For the pilot year of WhaleBlitz, there was a total of eight events hosted by five different organizations (Table 1). In total, 202 members of the public were engaged with WhaleBlitz watches over the three days.

Table 1. Information on WhaleBlitz events held between July 14th and 16th across the coast, with the associated Whale Trail sign location, and number of sightings submitted to WhaleReport during the event.

Date	Time (24 hr)	Host organization	Location	Nearest Whale Trail sign	Number of sightings
14-Jul-22	10:00 – 11:00	Strawberry Isle Marine Research Society	Lighthouse Loops, Wild Pacific Trail, Ucluelet	Wild Pacific Trail, Ucluelet	0
14-Jul-22	13:30 – 17:30	Parks Canada	Whytecliff Park, Vancouver	Lighthouse Park, West Vancouver	0
14-Jul-22	14:30 – 16:30	Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea	Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea, Sidney	Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea	0
15-Jul-22	11:00 – 15:00	The Whale Museum	Lime Kiln Point State Park, San Juan Island	Lime Kiln Point State Park	0
16-Jul-22	10:00 – 16:30	Ocean Wise	East Point, Saturna Island	East Point, Saturna Island, Gulf Islands National Park Reserve	18
16-Jul-22	11:00 – 15:00	Ocean Wise	Gowlland Point, Pender Island	Gowlland Point, South Pender	3
16-Jul-22	11:00 – 15:00	Ocean Wise	Fred and Bette Cotton Community Park, Mayne Island	Fred and Bette Cotton Community Park, Mayne Island	1
16-Jul-22	14:00 – 15:00	Parks Canada	East Point, Saturna Island	East Point, Saturna Island, Gulf Islands National Park Reserve	0
TOTAL					22



Day 1: July 14, 2022



The 2022 WhaleBlitz was launched with three events hosted by Parks Canada, SIMRS & Wild Pacific Trail, and Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea.

Parks Canada had a great turnout at Whytecliff Park and similarly many people stopped by the Lighthouse Loops to talk with SIMRS and Wild Pacific Trail in Tofino.

Unfortunately, no cetaceans were spotted at any of these events, but data on absence of cetaceans is equally as valuable for understanding where these important species spend their time throughout the year.



We did however receive 19 sightings reports through our WhaleReport app in other areas of the coast. There were 11 reports of humpback whales, 5 reports of killer whales (including Southern Residents), 2 reports of grey whales and a report of a harbour porpoise.

One of these killer whale sightings was reported by a naturalist on board of West Coast Launch in Chatham Sound. Gen Bock-Caron's photos and video enabled us to identify these individuals as the A42 Northern Resident matriline. This family of whales is often spotted in this area in the spring and early summer.



Day 2: July 15, 2022

The second day of the WhaleBlitz event featured a single, 4-hour watch hosted by The Whale Museum at Lime Kiln Point State Park.

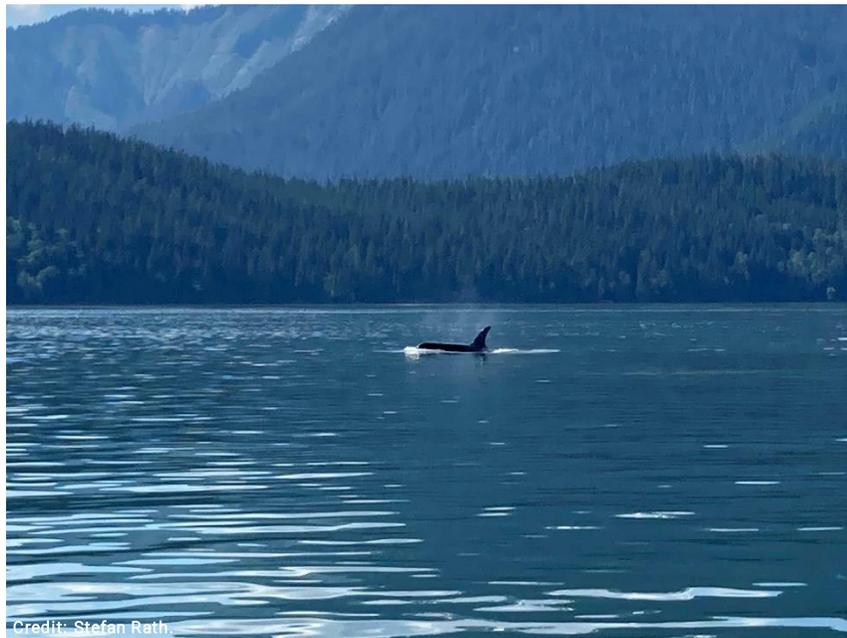
Despite the less-than-ideal spotting conditions, over 50 people stopped by the museum that day during the WhaleBlitz.

Similar to day 1, no cetaceans spotted at the event but we did receive 21 sightings from others areas of the coast via our WhaleReport app.

Humpbacks stole the show with 9 sightings, there were 6 reports of harbour porpoise, 4 reports of killer whales (including Northern residents) and 2 grey whale sighting reports.



Receiving reports is essential for determining habitat use of cetacean species, especially when we receive information on specific behaviors observed and able to identify individuals based on photographs. One of the humpbacks reported on July 15th was identified as individual BCX1057 "Divot". A family o Bigg's killer whales known as the T065Bs were reported hunting a river otter. Another report mentioned that a humpback was observed breaching over 50 times (!).



Day 3: July 16, 2022

The third and final day of planned WhaleBlitz watches was a busy day full of sightings in the Southern Gulf Islands.



Events hosted by Parks Canada and Ocean Wise engaged a total of 45 people throughout the day and resulted in a total of 22 sightings submitted to the WhaleReport app during events, including 21 harbour porpoise and 1 Transient (Bigg's) killer whale sighting (Figure 3)..

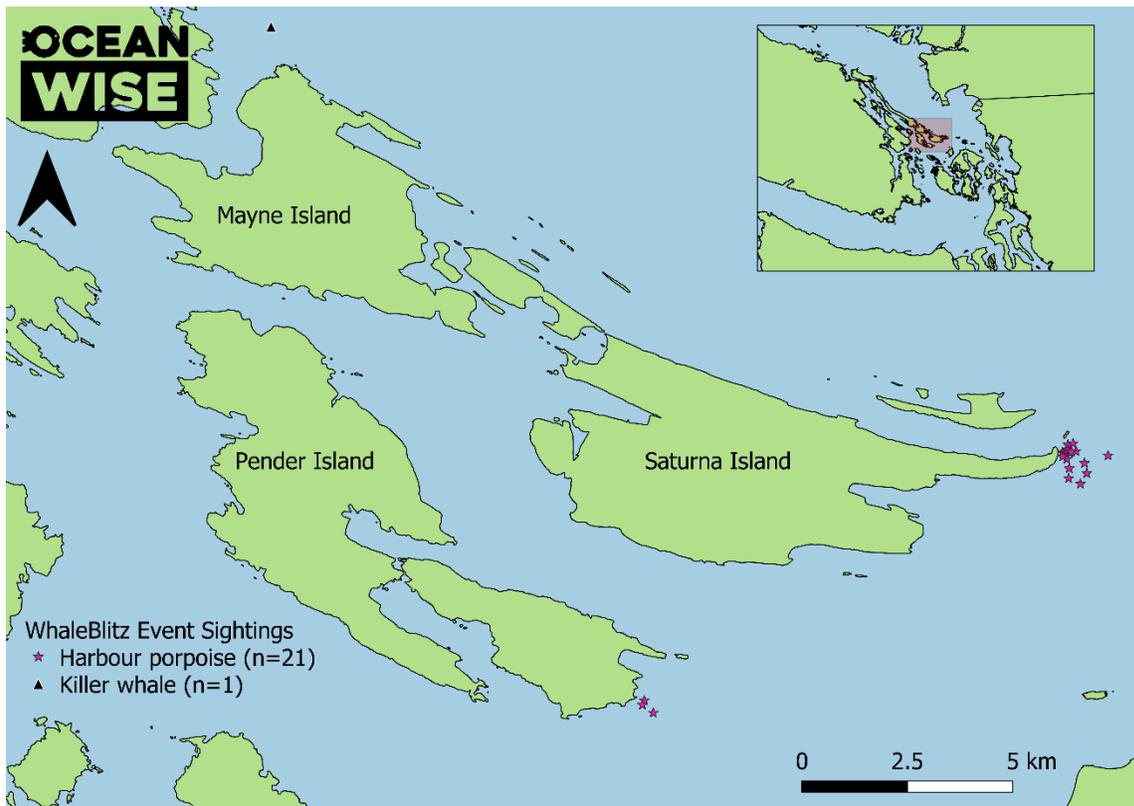


Figure 3. WhaleBlitz sightings around the Southern Gulf Islands for July 16, 2022.

In addition to the WhaleBlitz event sightings, we had a further 35 sightings reported to our WhaleReport app. The majority of these sightings consisted of humpback whales (22), followed by killer whales (8), harbour porpoise (3) and grey whales (2).

Day 3 was also a bumper day for photos and whale IDs! Bigg's killer whales T109As, some individuals from the T065As and T077 & T077E were reported, along with BCY0324 "Big Mama" and her newest calf, BCX1068's 2017 calf "Valiant", and BCXuk2012#2 "Constellation". Northern Resident killer whales A42s were also observed again in Chatham Sound.



Above: Northern Resident Killer Whale matriline A42s spotted in Chatham Sound again on day 3. Credit: Capt. Doug Davis.



Credit: Nina Rosmini.

Left: Humpback whale spotted off Langara Lodge (Haida Gwaii) during day 3 of WhaleBlitz.

Right: East Point on Saturna Island is a hotspot for harbour porpoises, with 18 spotted during one of the WhaleBlitz watches.



Credit: Ocean Wise.

Overall, 98 sightings were reported to the BCCSN via WhaleReport during the three-day event. The most reported species was humpback whale (42), followed by harbour porpoise (31), killer whale (18), grey whale (6) and an unidentified cetacean (1). Despite WhaleBlitz events only being hosted in the South Coast of BC and Washington State for the pilot year (Figure 4), we still received some great sightings reports from the North Coast (Figure 5).

WhaleBlitz Summary Maps

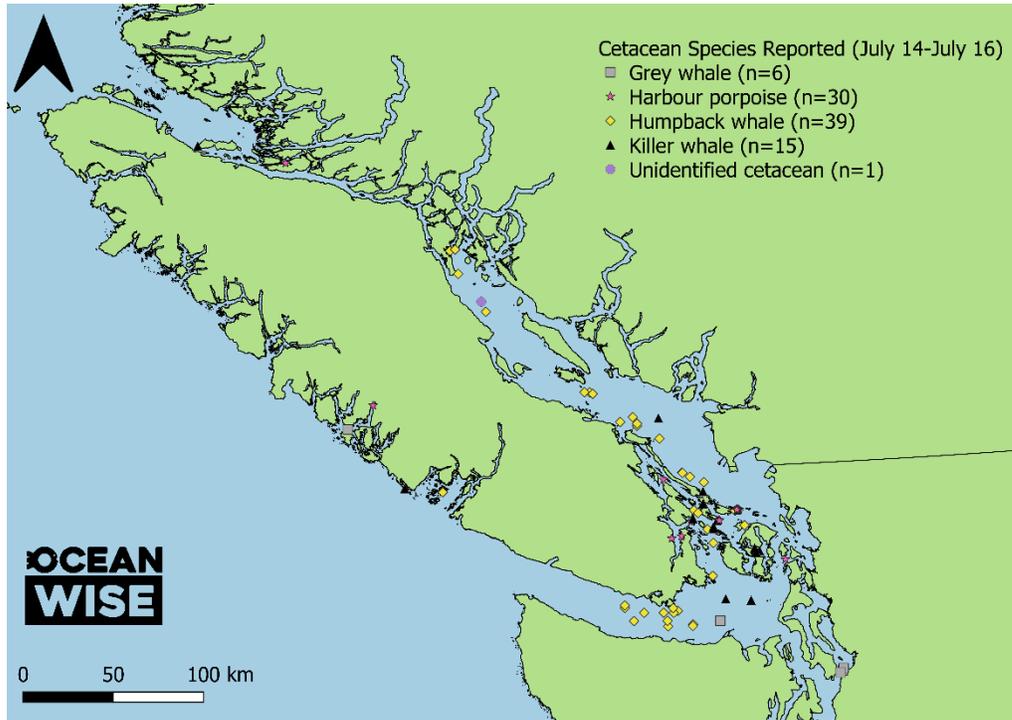


Figure 4. All sightings submitted to WhaleReport during the three days of WhaleBlitz watches for the South Coast of BC and Washington State. Opportunistic sightings not corrected for effort.

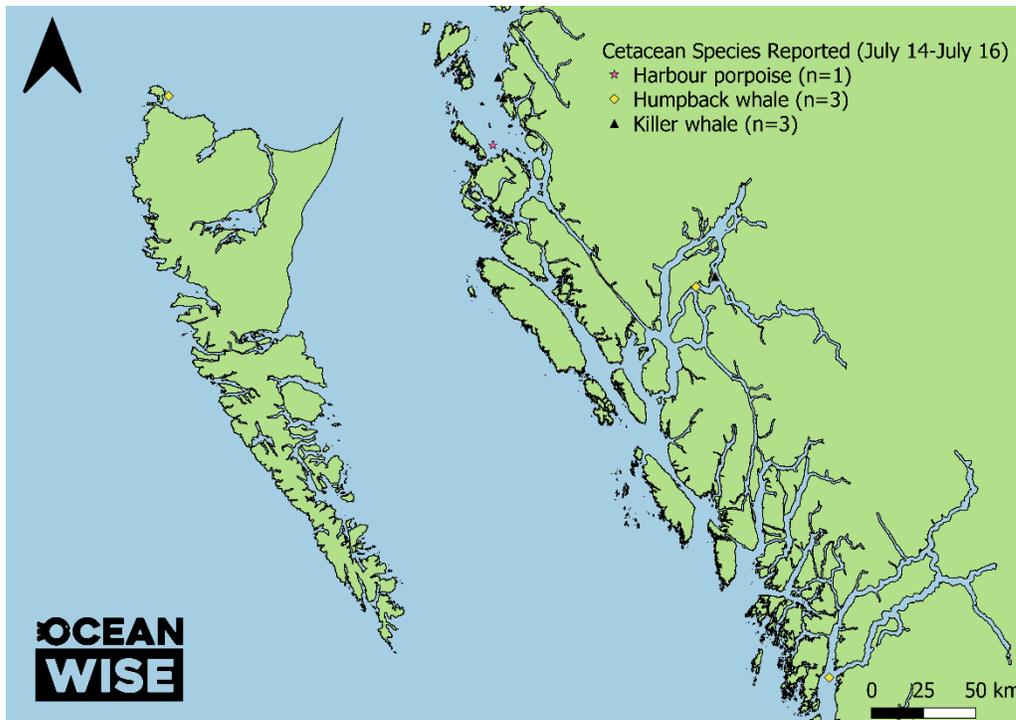


Figure 5. All sightings submitted to WhaleReport during the three days of WhaleBlitz watches for the North Coast of BC. Opportunistic sightings not corrected for effort.

WHALEBLITZ 2023

Building on the success of our pilot WhaleBlitz event, WhaleBlitz 2023 is due to be hosted across roughly the same dates, to facilitate consistency and allow us to conduct comparable analyses on sightings received and public engagement.

Our aims for 2023 are to:

1. Double the number of watches being held by hosts between the 14th-17th of July
2. Increase spatial range of WhaleBlitz watches by partnering with organizations and individuals in the North Coast
3. Partner with local ecotourism operators to engage with the public on board whale watch tour on how to report sightings to WhaleReport

We will be reaching out to 2022 WhaleBlitz partners in early spring 2023 to confirm our 2023 online info session and WhaleBlitz training dates (if applicable).

If you are interested in hosting a WhaleBlitz event in 2023, please contact Chloe Robinson at chloe.robinson@ocean.org.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to give a big thank you to all of our partners for hosting events throughout the WhaleBlitz long weekend: Parks Canada, Strawberry Island Marine Education Society (SIMRS), Wild Pacific Trail, and The Whale Museum. We are so grateful for your time, for collecting valuable data on cetaceans in our waters and for helping us to raise awareness about the importance of reporting cetacean sightings throughout the coast. We would also like to acknowledge that the WhaleBlitz received funding through Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program (2022-2025).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

WhaleReport

Anyone can download the WhaleReport app for free (Android and iOS) to report sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises in BC and Washington State. Visit our website to learn more: <https://ocean.org/action/send-a-sighting-save-a-whale/>.

The Whale Trail

Interested in finding out the Whale Trail sign closest to you? You can find information about all of the Whale Trail sign locations in Canada and US on their website: <https://thewhaletrail.org/>.



Be Whale Wise Guidelines

Make sure you are aware of the current marine mammal regulations in Canadian and US waters by visiting the Be Whale Wise website: <https://www.bewhalewise.org/>.

DFO Reporting Hotline

To report a distressed or dead marine mammal or sea turtle in Pacific waters, please contact the DFO BC Marine Mammal Response Network (Observe, Record, Report):

- Phone: 1-800-465-4336
- Email: DFO.ORR-ONS.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
- Radio: VHF Channel 16

Report prepared by Dr. Chloe Robinson (Senior Manager of Conservation Impact), Whales Initiative

Maps and photos included in this report are not for further distribution

If you have any questions about this report, please contact chloe.robinson@ocean.org

