



GRAY WHALES COUNT
SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL

A RESEARCH / EDUCATION PROJECT OF UCSB'S COAL OIL POINT NATURAL RESERVE, GOLETA + AMERICAN CETACEAN SOCIETY - CHANNEL ISLANDS + CASCADIA RESEARCH COLLECTIVE, OLYMPIA, WA + MARINE PHYSICAL LABORATORY, SCRIPPS INSTITUTION OF OCEANOGRAPHY, UCSD, LA JOLLA

COMMENTS ONLINE 2009

WEEK 15
MAY 11 - 17

PAGE 1 OF 2

Sunday's Report: May 17

Observation: 8 hours
Count Sunday: Northbound Er 0 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 38

How appropriate ... fade to gray:
The fog came in slowly over the last hour. The fanfare came from Platform Holly's foghorn at ten to five with the curtain closing on Counter Point at five.

Unfortunately, we saw no whales on the final day of this year's Count. If they had been they, we could have seen them. We had Fair observation quality for most of the day. We did see a single sea otter and many dolphins throughout the day, especially in the afternoon.

It has been a monumental year for us: our fifth survey, the addition of acoustic monitoring, and the development and maturity of a dedicated, conscientious, and skillful team.

Personally, I deeply appreciate and admire the Counters: Observers and Supervisors!

It has been an honor for me to work with each one. We have done some good work and had some good fun.

We all learned a great deal about our particular part of the ocean, the animals in and around the water, the impact of weather, and how scary fire can be. It has been a remarkable year. We identified an unprecedented array of species. Our estimate of total gray whales will likely be high, but our calf count was disturbingly low.

Our task is to monitor as best we can, to describe what is going on in our area. Even so, it is hard to report what appears to be a problem for the species. Next year, we do hope the results will be more encouraging.

Congratulations Counters. Very well done.

Tomorrow I will offer some more, very deserved acknowledgements.

Saturday's Report: May 16

Observation: 4.95 hours
Count Saturday: Northbound Er 0 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 38

We put in a full day at Counter Point with only about five hours being official. Late in the afternoon, a commercial fishing boat (crabs) was just the other side of the kelp where we had been hoping to find a cow/calf pair of gray whales. We did not see the boat until it was right in front. No, we did not find any whales of any type today.

It was not a total blind, though. We saw a lot of bottlenose-dolphin activity. Some came very close in the kelp and waves. The dolphins were sharing the surf with the local human-dude-types. Very fun.

A single, sea otter was seen at the edge of the kelp enjoying a snack. We did not see it again after that moment.

Tomorrow is our last day of the survey, and we are very ready to add to our Count!

Friday's Report: May 15

Observation: 6.82 hours
Count Friday: Northbound Er 0 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 38

We did see whales: humpbacks, at least four about three miles due south. There were no gray whales this Friday.

Bottlenose dolphins were all around the Point today, back and forth, surging and slowly loping along. There was a single sea otter also.



GRAY WHALES COUNT
SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL

COMMENTS ONLINE 2009

WEEK 15
MAY 11 - 17

PAGE 2 OF 2

Fog developed in the afternoon and put us in Time Out for an hour and eleven minutes. Yes, we still appreciate the fog.

Thursday's Report: May 14

Observation: 8 hours
Count Thursday: Northbound Er 0 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 38

The seas were a mess in the Channel in front of us. Two swells were opposing each other. As wind waves crossed, the peaks blew up in spray. It didn't cause us to lose focus, but it didn't help either. All the Counters were intent on finding a calf or calves as an indication that more may have been born this year. We still have hope for our final three days, and we are glad the Piedras Blancas group will be on-station for twelve days past our close.

Yes, today we were shutout again by the whales.

We had three sightings of bottlenose dolphins and one sighting of one sea otter (with a gull).

Wednesday's Report: May 13

Observation: 8 hours
Count Wednesday: Northbound Er 0 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 3

The wind was not too strong, less than forecast. The haze affected our observation quality. Even so, it was nice on Counter Point, and we are hoping that the firefighters continue to get a break controlling the fire that is now 80% contained, with no homes in danger at this time.

Although we did not see any gray whales today, we did find two otters in the kelp and enjoyed several passes of bottlenose dolphins.

Tuesday's Report: May 12

Observation: 8 hours
Count Tuesday: Northbound Er 2 Calves 1
Count Season: Northbound Er 540 Calves 38

No fog; and we had gale warnings, so we were a bit apprehensive about the remains of the fire. So far, so good. The wind was not strong where we were, and we are hoping it won't be in the mountains.

We counted a gray whale cow/calf pair that was sighted just before eleven. We also saw two sea otters, and bottlenose dolphins going back and forth, perhaps after the grunion gathering offshore and waiting for late-night, high tide to come on shore to lay their eggs. It is a quintessential southern California event, loved by humans of all ages, and apparently birds and dolphins, and sea lions.

Monday's Report: May 11

Observation: 8 hours
Count Monday: Northbound Er 1 Calves 0
Count Season: Northbound Er 538 Calves 37

We are still putting up with and loving fog. For most of the day we had poor visibility but a good opening in front of us and very calm seas that allowed us to notice many sea lions scattered throughout the area. We also saw about five groups of bottlenose dolphins and two sea otters in the kelp off Isla Vista.

We had the best visibility in four or more days at three and at four we saw our first whale blow. We tracked the single, young, gray whale across Counter Point and through the buoys to the west. It was our only whale of the day.

Yes, we discussed the fact that when the sun came out we found a whale. We concluded, however, that we did not see a whale earlier because there were no whales to be seen.

