

Status Report of Conservation and Researches on the Western Gray Whales in Japan, May 2009 – April 2010

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Abstract

Following the IWC Resolution 2001-3, 2004-1 and 2005-3, the present paper reported status of conservation and researches on the western gray whales. One sighting of an animal which was thought to be a juvenile gray whale was made from POP sighting, while no sighting was reported from systematic sightings in Japan, during the period from May 2009 to April 2010. Some research activities and administrative action were carried out for gray whale conservation during the period concerned.

Introduction

As in IWC Resolution 2001-3, which *inter alia* called on range states and others to actively pursue all practicable actions to eliminate anthropogenic mortality and minimize anthropogenic disturbance to the western gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) population; IWC Resolution 2004-1, which *inter alia* called upon range states to develop or expand national monitoring and research programme on western gray whales; and a further IWC Resolution 2005-3 supporting further efforts to conserve this population, IWC has largely urge the conservation of western gray whales.

Under such circumstances, as response to those IWC Resolutions, Japan provided scientific information on the western gray whales in June 2005 to May 2006 by Kato *et al.* (2006), in June 2006 to May 2007 by Kato *et al.* (2007), in June 2007 to April 2008 by Kato *et al.* (2008) and in May 2008 to April 2009 by Kato *et al.* (2009). We hereby submit similar report for this year meeting on the information for the period from May 2009 to April 2010.

All known occurrences of the western gray whales around Japanese coasts since 1955 is summarized in Table 1.

Sightings

Systematic Sightings

Miyashita *et al.* (2010) compiled sighting information of all large cetaceans encountered during all of systematic whale sighting surveys by National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries. While a total of 6,356.2 n. miles for their searching distances, no gray whale was seen. Bando *et al.* (2010) reported sightings from the systematic manner (6,374 n. miles) made at JARPN II – offshore component in 10 May to 29 July 2009, but no gray whale was found. Also, Yasunaga *et al.* (2010) and

Kishiro *et al.* (2010) reported no gray whale from sightings by JARPN II – coastal component at Ishinomaki-Ayukawa (Miyagi) and Kushiro (Hokkaido) in April to October 2009.

POP sightings during small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries

There was no report of gray whale sightings by POP bases from all of small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries operations in May 2009 to April 2010.

Other POP sightings

There was a sighting report of one animal which was thought to be a gray whale in POP sighting from Mie Prefecture Fisheries Research Institute, which was made at its research boat during regular oceanographic survey at 33°52'N - 136°10'E on 4 November 2009. The Animal was likely to be juvenile at about 6 – 7m in body length. The report was transmitted from Mie Prefectural Government to the Fisheries Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (FAJ) on 9 November 2009. FAJ forwarded the sighting information to four neighboring prefectures on the same day, and to all other Pacific coastal prefectures (including Seto-Inland Sea coastal prefectures) west of Kanagawa Prefecture on the next day, to draw their attention, and asked them to issue a warning to concerned parties

Mortality

Stranding

No stranding of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

Entanglement

No entanglement of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

Research Activities

Kato and his colleague's conducted skeletal measurement of two gray whales (caw and calf pair) entangled off Onagawa Town in June 2005. Analyses on the measurements will be published somewhere in near future. Public display of those mounted skeletons has been started on end of March/April 2010; Cow (12.8m in body length; Fig.1) at Whale Exhibition Gallery, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, Minato-ku Tokyo; Calf (7.8m female in body length) at Oshika Whale Land, Aukawa, Ishinomaki, Miyagi.

Mitochondrial DNA analysis was conducted for the sample of gray whales stranded on beach or bycaught in set nets along the Japanese coast from 1995 to 2007. The generated data was then analyzed in conjunction with those obtained from the published papers, e.g., Leduc *et al.* (2002), to better understand the genetic relationship of the western and eastern populations of gray whales at the wider geographic area. The results of the genetic study are presented in SC/62/BRG5 by Kanda of ICR and His colleagues.

Administrative action

As a follow-up to the discussions made at the 61st Annual Meeting of IWC/SC, FAJ created an educational leaflet (Fig. 2) in an electronic format, and is scheduled to distribute it to governments of all coastal prefectures in May 2010. The leaflet asks fishermen to: 1) try to release gray whales alive when they are found in a set-net or other fishing gear; and 2) report immediately to FAJ via

competent prefectural government when gray whales are sighted. It also reminds fishermen that catch (including by-catch) of gray whales and sales/possession of their products is prohibited under the Fisheries Resources Protection Act. In addition, FAJ will instruct all coastal prefectural governments to share sighting information of gray whales, if any, with governments of neighboring prefectures, when it distributes the leaflet.

Table 1. All known or reported gray whale occurrences around Japan since 1955 to present (till of April 2010).

Date dd/mm/yy	From which waters	Pacific side ?	Juvenile?	n	Source	
					Status	Reference
16/03/1955	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
10/06/1959	Off Kii-Ohshima, Kushimoto, Wakayama 33.29N-135.55E	Pacific	?	1	Sighting	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
02/02/1968	Off estuary of Kumano River. Shingu, Wakayama 33.43N-136.02E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.0m female	1	Unknown*	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
??/04/1970	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
27/03/1982	Off Toba (Ise Bay), Mie 34.28N-136.53E	Pacific	Juvenile**	1	Sighting	Furuta (1984)
25/04/1985	Off Taiji, Wakayama 33.34N-136E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting (through TV)	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
25/01/1990	Kohzu, Kanagawa 35.16N-139.13E	Pacific	Juvenile 8.0m male	1	Beached	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
Middle/04/ 1993	Off Izu-Ohshima, Tokyo 34.30N-139.30E	Pacific	Juvenile	2***	Sighting	Mochizuki, Mori and Ishikawa (p.c.)
07/04/1995	Toyokoro, Obihiro, Hokkaido 42.35N-143.32E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.5m female	1	Beached	Sawamura and Kimura (p.c.)
16/05/1996	Suttu, Hokkaido 42.45N-140.10E	Sea of Japan	Adult	1	Entanglement	Fisheries Agency
02/03/1997	Matunami, Kashiwazaki, Niigata 37.24N-138.34E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Beached (skull only)	ICR (2005)
22/07/1997	Off Kumanoura, Saga, Kochi 33.06N-133.09E	Pacific	Juvenile	2	Sighting	Kato and Tokuhiko (1997)
19/03/2002	Miyazaki beach, Miyazaki 31.50N-131.27E	Pacific	Juvenile Est. 7.7m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2003)
06/05/2003	Off Shizuoka (Suruga Bay), Shizuoka 35.00N-138.46E	Pacific	Juvenile, 9-10m	2	Sighting	Shizuoka TV Asahi
11/05/2005	Tomiyama (Tokyo Bay), Chiba 35.04N-139.49E	Pacific	Juvenile, 7.81m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2005)
15/07/2005	Enoshima, Onagawa Miyagi 38°23'N - 141°37'E	Pacific	Cow (12.79m) Calf (7.75m)	2	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2006)
18/01/2007	Sanriku, Ofunato, Iwate 39°09'N - 141°54'E	Pacific	Female 9.19m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2007)
01/08/2007	Nishikioka, Tomakomai, Hokkaido	Pacific	Female 12.33m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2008)
04/11/2009	Off Owas, Mie 33°52'N - 136°10'E	Pacific	Juvenile, Ca. 6 – 7 m	1	Sighting	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2010)

*: Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970) reported as “Dead might be caused by the wound made by someone during the evening of the day”.

** : Furuta (1984) estimated animal length to be 12m, but photographs of the animal clearly indicates much smaller length indicating juvenile.

***: There was an alternative that one additional animal was seen in adjacent waters.

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Fig.1. Display of mounted skeleton of a gray whale cow which was entangled off Onagawa in July 2007. It started to public display on 7 April 2010 at Whale Exhibition Gallery Tokyo University of Marine Science and technology, Tokyo.

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Fig.2. The proposed FAJ educational leaflet to draw attention to release the western gray whales from fishing gears if they will be entangled, and it also request to report their information to local authorities if the animals will appear.