

Interim Report: IWC Research Contract 16, Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue

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Abstract

College of the Atlantic (COA) has maintained a collection of humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) identification photographs from the Antarctic since 1987. In 1998 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) approved funding to support the expansion of this catalogue to members of the IWC, with an aim to substantially improve the accessibility and organization of the database. The collection has been internationally collaborative from its beginning, with photographic contributions from 233 researchers and opportunistic sources. During the contract period, the Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue (AHWC) catalogued 349 photo-identification images representing 196 individual humpback whales from Antarctic and southern hemisphere waters. These images were submitted by 43 individuals and research organizations. Photographic comparison of submitted photographs to the AHWC during the contract period yielded 23 previously known individuals. These submissions bring the total number of catalogued whales identified by fluke, right dorsal fin/flank and left dorsal fin/flank photographs to 2857, 409 and 405 respectively. This report details these findings, as well as other recent advances in the AHWC.

Introduction

The Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue (AHWC) is an international collaborative project investigating movement patterns of humpback whales in the Southern Ocean and corresponding lower latitude waters. College of the Atlantic (COA) has maintained a collection of humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) identification photographs from the Antarctic since 1987, with initial contributions coming primarily from collaborating scientists and opportunistic sources from South America and the Antarctic Peninsula. In 1998, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) approved funding to support the expansion of this catalogue, with an aim to improve the accessibility and scope of the project.

The collection has grown substantially in size and geographic scope. It now contains records of individual whales collected throughout the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, in all of the Antarctic management areas, the feeding grounds in southern Chile and also in most of the known or suspected low-latitude breeding areas, allowing comparisons to be made over all of the major regions used by Southern Hemisphere humpback whales and spanning more than two decades. Early matches confirmed migration of humpbacks between the Antarctic Peninsula and the western coast of South America (Ecuador and Colombia) (Stone et al. 1990, Stevick et al. 2004). More recent matches have documented migration of humpbacks between the eastern coast of South America (Brazil) and Sector II (South Georgia) (Stevick et al. 2006), between East Australia and Sector V (Rock et al. 2006), between the western coast of Central America (Costa Rica) and the Antarctic Peninsula (Rasmussen et al. 2007), and between American Samoa and the Antarctic Peninsula (SC/60/SH5).

SC/60/SH19

The collection is internationally collaborative, with photographic contributions from 233 researchers and opportunistic sources. This interim report summarizes progress to date on the various tasks assigned within the contract between COA and the IWC.

Task 1: Compile three collections of photographs of Antarctic Humpback Whales

A total of 349 photographs were catalogued during the contract period, including the following:

International Whaling Commission (IWC): 24 individuals, SOWER cruises
Fundación Ecuatoriana para el Estudio de Mamíferos Marinos (FEMM): 55 individuals, Ecuador

Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary: 62 individuals, American Samoa

Centro de Conservacion Cetacea (CCC): 1 individual, Chile

Projeto Baleia Jubarte (PBJ): 1 individual, Brazil

Opportunistic: 40 individuals, Antarctic Peninsula; 2 individuals, Tonga; 11 individuals, E. Australia

	No. of photographs	No. of whales	No. of resightings	No. of new whales
American Samoa	79	41	2	39
Antarctic Peninsula	156	81	13	68
Antarctica	40	24	1	23
Brazil	1	1	1	0
Chile	1	1	0	1
Ecuador	55	36	5	31
E. Australia	15	11	1	10
Tonga	2	2	0	2
Total	349	196	23	173

Table 1. Photographs catalogued during contract period.

Matches made during the contract period to previously sighted individuals include resightings between Ecuador and the Antarctic Peninsula (4) and American Samoa and the Antarctic Peninsula (1), and within-region resightings in the Antarctic Peninsula (9), Brazil (1), Ecuador (1), American Samoa (1) and Eastern Australia (1).

The fluke photographic collection now consists of 4,908 photographs of 2,857 individual whales. Of these 263 were sighted in more than one year. The right dorsal fin/flank collection consists of 517 photographs of 409 individuals. The left dorsal fin/flank collection consists of 501 photographs of 405 individuals. The longest interval between re-sightings was 22 years for individual #0958, first identified in 1981 and photographed again in 2002. There were 42 individuals with three or more sightings in different areas or years. Distribution of the photographs by region is shown in Table 2.

During the contract period a re-sighting was confirmed between American Samoa and the Antarctic Peninsula. The details of this finding are presented in SC/60/SH5.

Region	Fluke		R. dorsal		L. dorsal	
	Photos	# whales	Photos	# whales	Photos	# whales
Antarctic Peninsula	1822	936	49	33	42	34
Antarctic II-VI total	333	196	145	110	169	127
Sector II*	11	9				
Sector III	111	62	16	13	26	15
Sector IV	86	49	82	59	72	63
Sector V	67	38	30	26	53	37
Sector VI	10	6	17	12	18	12
Gabon	94	78	-	-	-	-
Ghana	1	1	-	-	-	-
S. Africa	2	1	-	-	-	-
St. Helena	3	2	-	-	-	-
Brazil	1449	828	2	2	5	5
Peru	2	2				
Chile	82	77	-	-	-	-
Ecuador/Colombia/ Costa Rica	693	493	69	27	62	24
American Samoa	138	75	-	-	-	-
Tahiti	1	1	-	-	-	-
Tonga	2	2	-	-	-	-
New Zealand	2	1	-	-	-	-
E. Australia	24	17	1	1	2	1
W. Australia	317	242	251	236	221	213
TOTALS	4,908	2,857	517	409	501	405

Table 2. Fluke and dorsal photographic collections, by region. Individual whales that have been identified in multiple regions are listed in each region, so the total number of individuals listed may not be the same as the column totals. Antarctic Peninsula includes individuals identified along the

coast of the AP and South Shetland Islands as far east as Elephant Island (~55°W). Area II includes individuals identified east of Elephant Island to 0° (see SC/57/SH2)

Current catalogues from FEMM, PBJ and Projeto Baleias Antartico (PBA) have been submitted to the AHWC, along with photos from the IWC SOWER cruises from 1999/00 through 2006/07. Cataloguing of the PBA catalogue has been completed, and analysis was included in the 2006 report. Analysis of the PBJ catalogue is in progress, with approximately 620 individuals remaining to be catalogued. The FEMM catalogue is in progress, with approximately 350 individuals awaiting analysis. Analysis of photos from the IWC SOWER cruises is in progress, with 65 awaiting analysis.

	Directed Humpback Research	Eco-tourism	Other Opportunistic
Antarctic Peninsula	494	463	86
Areas II-VI	359	6	38
Gabon	74	–	4
Ghana	–	–	1
S. Africa	–	–	1
St. Helena	–	–	2
Brazil	821	12	–
Peru	–	–	2
Chile	77	–	–
Ecuador/Colombia/	509	4	6
American Samoa	75	–	–
Tahiti	–	1	–
Tonga	–	2	–
New Zealand	–	–	1
E. Australia	3	13	4
W. Australia	305	3	–
AHWC Total	2,686	504	145

Table 3. Numbers of individual humpback whales in the AHWC contributed from directed research, eco-tourism and other opportunistic sources, by area.

Progress continues in efforts to stimulate submission of opportunistic data from eco-tourism cruise ships in the Southern Ocean and from research organizations and expeditions working throughout this region and the Southern Hemisphere. For the period 1981 through 2008, 1,308 photos representing 627 individuals have been submitted from ecotourism and other opportunistic sources, as detailed in Table 3. Opportunistic data represent a significant portion of the AHWC. In the Antarctic Peninsula region, approximately 50% of the catalogued individuals were contributed by opportunistic sources. The availability of these data has broadened our understanding of the exchange between areas and in some cases

provided information that was previously not available. The submission of photos from a cruise ship off South Georgia in 2004 of an animal previously seen off Brazil resulted in the first long-distance re-sighting of an individual from these areas (Stevick et al. 2006). Photos taken from a cruise ship resulted in one of several matches between the Peninsula and Costa Rica (Rasmussen et al. 2007). The AHWC provides a unique clearing house for these opportunistic data, facilitating public education and participation, and providing a valuable source of data to researchers for scientific analysis.

Task 2. Scan and archive all images and link to databases in Task 3.

All of the catalogued photographs have been digitized. Images that were not submitted in digital form were scanned at 300 dpi and stored in TIFF format. Images to be included on the web page are additionally stored at 100dpi in JPG format in a FileMaker Pro database which serves the images to the web page. The image management software iMatch© is used for image analysis. The best images of each individual are stored in the iMatch© database, and assigned categories including pattern type and geographic area. During the past year the iMatch database has been enhanced by the additional of special categories such as injuries and scar shape, allowing the user to further refine searches and increasing the efficiency of analysis. Photographs of an individual are compared to the catalogue by two technicians before being considered new to the catalogue. Other relevant data can be stored in the database as well, making it a very effective tool for catalogue management. Comparison using iMatch© has reduced the time required for image analysis by as much as 75%.

Task 3. Create relational databases for associated field data.

Data are stored in FoxPro relational databases. The fluke and dorsal/flank collections are combined in a single data file but distinguished by use of a data field indicating fluke or dorsal type, to facilitate analysis of the collections independently or collectively. Digital images and data are backed up daily and kept in a separate location.

Task 4. Report to contributors on completion of photo comparison.

A standardized data report is issued to all contributors on completion of cataloguing of submissions. The report includes the catalogue number assigned, the data recorded in the file, and the contributor and region for any previous sighting history.

Task 5. Provide on-line access to the photographic collection.

The AHWC is available on-line at <http://www.coa.edu/antarctic>. Only those photographs which we have received permission to publish electronically are included in the on-line collection. The database is searchable by fluke pigmentation pattern, geographic area, or catalogue number. Dorsal fin/flank collections are also available on line, although a search criterion allowing the user to specify dorsal fin/flank has not yet been added. Images displayed are identified by catalogue number and the contact organization for the contributor. No additional data are available on-line, and the images displayed are low resolution (100dpi - suitable for display but not for print).

In accordance with guidelines from the 2002 Scientific Committee Meeting and IWC policy, access to images collected on the IWC-funded research cruises is available to everyone. In

addition to IWC images, all photographs taken by COA researchers and all opportunistic photos have been included in the public access database. Users may choose to search the public database, or log in as a contributor and search the contributor-only database. All users, whether logging in to the public or contributor-only database, must agree to terms of use, which include not publishing or reproducing information without written consent.

Contributors are contacted to determine whether or not they wish to keep their photos in the secure database accessible only to fellow contributors, or include them in the public access database. All contributors are assigned a login and password which gives them access to the secure database and are advised of the security protocol of the project, whereby users are not permitted to share their password with others, or reuse photographs or other information without permission. In the coming year, updating the website will be one of the main project goals.

Recent publications arising from the AHCW

(* indicates that opportunistically collected data were included in the analysis):

*Rasmussen, K., D.M. Palacios, J. Calambokidis, M.T. Saborio, L. Dalla Rosa, E.R. Secchi, G.H. Steiger, J.M. Allen and G.S. Stone. 2007. Southern Hemisphere humpback whales wintering off Central America: insights from water temperature into the longest mammalian migration. *Biol. Lett.* doi:10.1098/rsbl.2007.0067.

Rock, J., L.A. Pastene, G. Kaufman, P. Forestell, K. Matsuoka and J. Allen. 2006. A note on East Australia Group V Stock humpback whale movement between feeding and breeding areas based on photo-identification. *J. Cet. Res. Man.* 8(1):29-31.

*Stevick, P.T., L. Pacheco de Godoy, M. McOsker, M. Engel and J. Allen. 2006. A note on the movement of a humpback whale from Abrolhos Bank, Brazil to South Georgia. *J. Cet. Res. Man.* 8(3):297-300.

Recent SC Documents

*Allen, J.M., C. A. Carlson, B. Holm and P.T. Stevick. 2007. Interim Report: IWC Research Contract 16, Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue. Document SC/59/SH17 submitted to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

*Allen, J.M., P.T. Stevick and C. Carlson. 2006. The Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue: Description and Summary. Document SC/A06/HW58 submitted to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

Robbins, J.; L. Dalla Rosa; J.M. Allen; D.K. Mattila; and E.R. Secchi. 2008. Humpback whale photo identification reveals exchange between American Samoa and the Antarctic Peninsula, and a new mammalian distance record. Document SC/60/SH5 submitted to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

*Stevick, P.T., A. Aguayo-Lobo, J.M. Allen, C. Castro, K. Chater, L. Dalla Rosa, F. Félix, B. Haase, M. Llano, C. Olavarría, K. Rasmussen and E. Secchi.. 2006. Estimated Abundance of Humpback Whales off the West Coast of Central and South America (Group G). Document

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SC/A06/HW56 submitted to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

*Stevick, P.T., A. Aguayo-Lobo, J.M. Allen, K. Chater, L. Dalla Rosa, C. Olavarria and E. Secchi. 2006. Mark-recapture abundance estimates for humpback whales in the Antarctic Peninsula. Document SC/A06/HW54 submitted to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission

Literature Cited

- Rasmussen K, Palacios DM, Calambokidis J, Saborío MT, Dalla Rosa L, Secchi ER, Steiger GH, Allen JM, Stone GS (2007) Southern Hemisphere humpback whales wintering off Central America: insights from water temperature into the longest mammalian migration. *Biology Letters*:doi:10.1098/rsbl.2007.0067
- Rock J, Pastene LA, Kaufman GD, Forestell P, Matsuoka K, Allen J (2006) A note on East Australia Group V Stock humpback whale movement between feeding and breeding areas based on photo-identification. *J Cetacean Res Manage* 8:301–305
- Stevick PT, Aguayo A, Allen J, Avila IC, Capella J, Castro C, Chater K, Dalla Rosa L, Engel MH, Félix F, Flórez-González L, Freitas A, Haase B, Llano M, Lodi L, Munoz E, Olavarria C, Secchi E, Scheidat M, Siciliano S (2004) Migrations of individually identified humpback whales between the Antarctic Peninsula and South America. *J Cetacean Res Manage* 6:109-113
- Stevick PT, Pacheco de Godoy L, McOske M, Engel MH, Allen J (2006) A note on the movement of a humpback whale from Abrolhos Bank, Brazil to South Georgia. *J Cetacean Res Manage* 8:297-300
- Stone GS, Florez-Gonzalez L, Katona S (1990) Whale migration record. *Nature, Lond* 346:705

Proposed budget: IWC Research Contract 16, Antarctic Humpback Whale Catalogue

Investigators:

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Budget 2008-2009: This proposal seeks **£6,600** to continue the cataloging of submitted photographs and further development and enhancement of the system for on-line access. Budgetary amounts are in GBP.

AHWC BUDGET

Salary:

Project and database management	2,700
Photo comparison	8,000
Fringe @ 15%	1,600
Phone, fax and postage	100
Supplies	200

Total Budget	£12,600
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Requested from IWC: £6,600

Budget narrative: We have made tremendous progress in the catalogue with funding support from the IWC. Increasing awareness of the project among research organizations, tour operators and other potential contributors has widened the scope of the collection; research efforts in areas that had not previously been sampled have extended the geographic coverage. The AHWC has grown by over 35% in the last two years. In spite of adopting more efficient analysis techniques, the recent submission of catalogues from the PBA, PBJ and FEMM and IWC SOWER projects has produced a backlog of over 1,000 photos to be analyzed.

Recognizing the scope of work to be accomplished in the coming year and the importance of timely analysis to the contributing researchers and the scientific community, we are requesting that funding be maintained at **£6,600 GBP**. We will seek funding from other sources to provide the remaining funds required. Additional resources are provided by College of the Atlantic, including equipment and student assistants provided by College of the Atlantic, and time donated by Project Investigators Judith Allen and Carole Carlson.