

Update on the Russia-U.S. Western Gray Whale Photo-Identification Catalog



**WESTERN GRAY WHALES OFF SAKHALIN ISLAND, RUSSIA:
A CATALOG OF PHOTO-IDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS**

DAVID W. WELLER¹, AMANDA L. BRADFORD², GRIGORY A. TSIDULKO³,
YULIA V. IVASHCHENKO⁴, AIMÉE R. LANG¹, HYUN WOO KIM⁵,
SUSAN H. RICKARDS⁶, ALEXANDER M. BURDIN^{4,7}, ROBERT L. BROWNELL, JR.¹

¹ Southwest Fisheries Science Center
NOAA Fisheries
La Jolla, California, USA

² School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington, USA

³ International Fund for Animal Welfare
Moscow, RUSSIA

⁴ Kamchatka Branch of Pacific Institute of Geography
Far East Division - Russian Academy of Sciences
Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka, RUSSIA

⁵ Pukyong National University
Busan, KOREA

⁶ Hawaii Marine Mammal Consortium
Kamuela, Hawaii, USA

⁷ Alaska Sealife Center
Seward, Alaska, USA

Contact e-mail:
dave.weller@noaa.gov
alexander_burdin@alaskasealife.org
robert.brownell@noaa.gov

**Russia-U.S. Photo-ID Catalog
SC/58/BRG2 (2006)**

INF.3 (Extract of BRG2)

INF.8 (Extract of BRG2)

INF.22

INF.23

INF.24

INF.25

ABSTRACT

This electronic catalog presents identification photographs of 150 western gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) collected between 1994 and 2005 off Sakhalin Island, Russia, by the joint Russia-U.S. research program. The overarching objectives of making this catalog freely available are twofold: (1) to facilitate international cooperation and collaboration between current and future research groups collecting data on the western gray whale population; and (2) to provide an individual numbering scheme and standardized images of western gray whales that can be used for comparison by other research groups and organizations. This CD-based catalog is available on request and utilization of such is predicated by the data use agreement provided therein.

Catalog Data Source

Table 2. Annual survey effort, groups encountered and whales identified between 1994 and 2005.

Year	Sampling Period (mo, d)	Number of Surveys	Hours of Observation	Groups Encountered	Whales Identified
1994	09/07 - 09/12	1			10
1995	08/15 - 08/19	5	10.1	23	28
1997	07/09 - 09/08	22	33.4	114	47
1998	07/06 - 09/29	35	50.5	125	54
1999	06/29 - 10/13	56	122.0	434	69
2000	06/25 - 09/16	40	56.5	365	58
2001	06/25 - 09/25	49	101.8	448	72
2002	06/25 - 09/25	36	75.6	411	76
2003	07/15 - 09/13	22	41.7	219	75
2004	07/29 - 09/12	21	33.8	194	93
2005	07/04 - 09/09	20	40.9	160	92
Overall		307	566.3	2493	150 ¹

¹The number of whales identified annually includes resightings of individuals from previous years, resulting in a total of 150 identified individuals.



CATALOG ID NUMBER
032

NAME
FLEX

FIRST/LAST YEAR SEEN
1997/2005

GENETIC SAMPLE?
YES

COPYRIGHT AND DATA OWNERSHIP

The images and data included here have been provided on the understanding that they will only be used with the permission of the authors. Copyright remains with the senior author whom retains ownership of all photographs and data herein. It is envisioned that in most cases, other research groups studying western gray whales will collaborate with the Russia-U.S. research program in producing publications and an updated catalog based on matches made to the present catalog. To encourage this, and protect ownership of data from each current contributor, the amount of auxiliary information provided with the images in the catalog has been minimized. All users of this catalog must agree to the following: not to use data or images provided herein in any presentation, report, publication, product or commercial application without prior permission from the senior author of this catalog.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we wish to thank Bernd Würsig for helping to initiate the Russia-U.S. research program and offering his support, encouragement and friendship throughout. We have been fortunate to work with a wonderful cast of characters over the years and are especially indebted to: Sergey Blokhin, Bridget Ferris, Galya Fesenko, Glenn Gailey, Brice Hobbs, Dennis Ivanov, Toshio Kasuya, Natalia Krukova, Sergey Kuchin, Rick LeDuc, Yulia Levedeva, Bob Pitman, Alex Popryadukhin, Ivan Seryodkin, Maxim Sidorenko, Olga Sychenko, Alexey Trukhin, Yuri Shvetsov, Karina Tarasyan, Alexey Vladimirov, Valeriy Vladimirov, Katja Vorobieva, Sam Ward, Bridget Watts, Bernd Würsig, Anya Yachtmennikova, Kiril Zcharikov, Irina Zhalinsky and Yuri Zhalinsky. Justin Cooke and Paul Wade have been instrumental in conducting population assessments and we thank them for their collaboration. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of (in alphabetical order): the Alaska SeaLife Center, Animal Welfare Institute, Exxon Neftegas Limited, Humane Society of the United States, International Fund for Animal Welfare, International Whaling Commission, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Sakhalin Energy Investment Company, Texas A&M University, University of Washington, U.S. Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, U.S. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service. This project was conducted as part of the Marine Mammal Project under Area V: Protection of Nature and the Organization of Reserves within the U.S.-Russia Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection.

IISG Meeting - Vancouver 3-5 April 2006

Integration Of Western Gray Whale Photo-Identification Data (pp. 5)

Participants at the workshop discussed the costs and benefits of continuing two independent photo-id research programmes with relatively little collaboration to date. Consistency between the two catalogues has not been determined and procedures for identification and inclusion have not been compared. Combining these data sets, after they have passed through appropriate quality control procedures, would enable more precise estimation of the population and hence quicker detection of possible negative developments. Importantly, duplication of field effort potentially exposes the whales to unnecessary disturbance from research.

The IISG recommends that the following steps be taken towards integration of the photo-identification data:

1. Members of IBM and Russia-US teams meet to compare existing catalogs and develop a prototype master catalog.
2. The prototype master catalog be reviewed by external scientists nominated and agreed on by the IISG/WGWAP and stakeholders. An impartial body, such as IUCN or the Marine Mammal Commission, independently selects reviewers and carries the task forward.
3. Adjustments to the prototype catalog be made according to the outcome of independent review and subsequent assignment of a common individual numbering system.
4. A master catalog be created and shared between IBM and Russia-US teams and, potentially, others. Minimum data to be included would be common individual/catalog numbers and information on photographer/team responsible for the photographs.
5. Existing data sets (i.e., sighting information) be adjusted to match the master catalog.
6. Data sharing agreement be developed to protect confidentiality, data use and ownership. This agreement would incorporate interests of all stakeholders (IBM and Russia-US teams, SEIC, ENL). Assistance of the IISG/WGWAP and IUCN in this process would be sought.
7. Data be exchanged on a project-by-project basis using the data sharing agreement above.

Approval by SEIC, ENL, IBM, and the Russia-U.S. team is needed to carry the above collaboration forward.

The IISG recommends this initial step of collaboration to facilitate population assessment, reduce duplication of field efforts, and avoid disturbance of the whales. Such collaboration also could facilitate development of new, more effective approaches to population monitoring.