



# THE PINNIPED PRESS

A newsletter by and for Noyo Center for Marine Science Volunteers

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## Volunteer Opportunities

We are currently looking for volunteers to help at the Slack Tide Café on Thursdays – Mondays. We have 2 or 3 hour shifts between 11 am and 3:30 pm and an additional shift on Fridays and Saturdays from 4 pm to 7 pm. You must get a food handler's certificate.

We are in need of videographers and photographers to help document our Whale Festival activities and more.

Please contact [wendi@noyocenter.org](mailto:wendi@noyocenter.org) for more information.

## 2023 Whale Festival Events

March is Whale Festival in our area, and thanks to our volunteers for your participation and support. The following is a snapshot of some of the things that the Noyo Center has planned. Our [WEBSITE](#) has complete information and a full calendar of all events and activities.

March 4-26: Guided Whale Walks – Weekends on the Noyo Headlands Trail, 10A-Noon.

March 11-19: Crow's Nest Special Exhibits. Daily 10A-3P.

March 15, 6:30 pm: Science Talk: Whale Safe. Join us to learn more about this amazing technology developed to prevent ship strikes. This is a zoom talk: [REGISTER HERE](#).

March 18, 10A-3P: Mendonoma Whale and Seal Study at the Crow's Nest. Join Scott and Tree Mercer, founders of Mendonoma Whale and Seal Study, for gray whale counting from the deck of the Crow's Nest.

March 18, 5 -7 pm: Whale Tales & Wine, Slack Tide Café. Science Social presentation focusing on the rare sperm whale that washed ashore in 2022.

March 18, 11 am to 1 pm: Book signing: The Art of Discovering Whales. Local author and whale artist, Larry Foster will be at the Discovery Center.

## 2023 Whale Festival Events (continued)

March 19, 1-3 PM: Humpback Whale Acoustics. Whale acoustics expert and Noyo Center Science Advisor Jeff Jacobsen joins us at the Discovery Center with recordings of humpback song from a recent excursion off the Mendocino Coast.

March 19: The Ocean Commotion Show with Christopher's Musical Marionettes. Join us at the Slack Tide Café when puppeteer Christopher Oates gets behind the strings to bring his "Ocean Commotion Show". Shows are at 11AM and 1PM, and there is a \$5 ticket price at the door. All ages welcome.

March 23, 6:30 PM: Science Talk: Mendonoma Gray Whale Observations and Research. Scott and Tree Mercer will present data on what they have learned so far about the migration and health of the gray whales, including information they collected from the deck of the Crow's Nest. This is a zoom talk, [REGISTER HERE](#).

## Volunteer Highlight: Charlene McAllister

By Linda Francis



Charlene McAllister hails from a family of first-generation immigrants. Her dad's family came from Finland and her mom's family are Swiss Italians. The family settled in Eureka and later in Crescent City where Charlene graduated from Del Norte County High School, and from there to the University of Portland School of Nursing. Charlene's nursing career extended beyond hands-on nursing. In the 1970s, she worked for the Government Oversight Committee's Professional Standard Review where she assured national standards were being met in hospitals from Crescent City to Lake County. She loved visiting hospitals, seeing what worked, and sharing promising ideas.

Over the years she had other jobs that took her elsewhere, including as a circulation secretary for a newspaper, and as a medical researcher for the emerging cardiac ultrasound technology, and in 1982 she became Director of Nursing at Coast District Hospital, getting her back to her beloved northern California coast.

One day a colleague asked Charlene to join her, her husband and a friend on a "My husband lost a bet" dinner. The day of the dinner there came around and there was a knock at the door, and there stood AD Abramson. She says "I immediately knew he was the one. And he felt the same at that very moment as well." They married in 1983. AD was very active in the community, including establishing the AD Abramson Fund for Public Health with the Community Foundation of Mendocino County. Sadly, AD died of cancer in 1994.

Around this time Charlene's youngest son Sean was living in Eureka working with Ron LeValley in an environmental consulting business, which also did projects in Fort Bragg. Sean would show up at her house with birding crews who liked to have their coffee early and botanists who preferred a later start. The visits also included Ron LeValley. She and Ron established a friendship over the next two years, which blossomed into a romance and life partnership.

Ron and Sheila Semans, executive director of the Noyo Center, had worked together in the past, which led to his involvement working on a 73' blue whale that had washed up in a cove near the Botanical Gardens. Ron was soon waist deep in blue whale and became the photographer for the event.

Ron and Charlene were founders of a small non-profit, MRB Wildlife Research, intended to be used as a fiscal sponsor for various projects. The whale became one such project, as money was needed to support the retrieval of the whale's bones, and to find a place to put it. Charlene was central to raising money for the project, writing thank you letters, tracking volunteers and more. When the blue whale washed ashore in 2009, the Noyo Center for Marine Science was in its early days, and the event generated even more community interest in marine science research on our coast. When the organization opened its first interpretive site, the Crow's Nest, Charlene was one of the first docents. She continues to volunteer now and again and is a valued supporter.

## Volunteer Highlight: Charlene McAllister (continued)

Charlene is also an active member of the Board of Directors of the Mendocino Coast Health Care Foundation, which raises and distributes money for a variety of health care related projects. She is active in the League of Woman Voters and the Audubon Society. While she has been on various Boards since her 30s, she feels she can often do more from the outside, and she does, continuing to make amazing contributions to our community every day.

## Gray Whale Migration

By Toni Rizzo

Every year, thousands of gray whales thrill Pacific coast residents and tourists as they travel between their northern feeding grounds in the arctic and their southern breeding grounds in Baja California and back. Making the second longest migration (first place going to some humpback whales migrating from the Antarctic to Costa Rica), these behemoths travel about 12,000 miles round-trip. Gray whales leave the Bering, Chukchi, and western Beaufort seas in September to mate and give birth in the Baja lagoons from late December to February.



Pregnant females lead the southbound migration, with adult males and young whales following behind. Females generally give birth every other year, during the migration or in the warm, shallow lagoons of Baja from early January to mid-February. Non-pregnant females and males also make the journey to mate and relax in the lagoons and bays of Baja.

The whales begin traveling north by mid-February, with the females and calves lagging behind the rest. Females with calves often form small groups and stay close to shore to avoid predators, including orca whales and great white sharks. March is usually the best time to see the whales off the coast of northern California, where they spend time spouting, and spy-hopping, and occasionally even breaching.

In the last few decades, some gray whales have stopped their migration well south of the Arctic, spending some or all of their summer foraging and feeding along the west coast from Vancouver Island to Mendocino. Some of these whales can be seen from shore all summer, with the highest numbers concentrated near Newport, Oregon. They are now called the PCFG, Pacific Coast Feeding Group. For more information on this: [pcfgconsortium.org](http://pcfgconsortium.org)

On May 31 2019, thanks to work done by the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network (thanks Sarah Grimes and the Beach Response Team!) NOAA Fisheries officially declared that the elevated numbers of gray whale strandings in 2019 on the west coast of North America was an Unusual Mortality Event (UME). Although this is overall one of the healthiest whale populations, each year the number of gray whales has decreased. So far there is no overall cause determined for the increased mortality, although many whales, including a few seen on our coast, are very thin when stranding, pointing a finger to a lack of available food. Climate instability and warming seas are suspected to be changing the concentration of available food. We continue to learn more about this as science progresses.

### Gray Whale Migration References

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3. Carwadine M. *Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises*. 1995.
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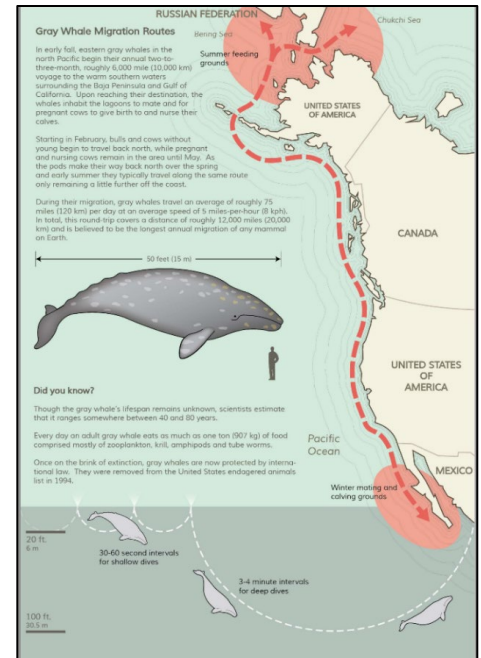
## Gray Whale Migration Challenge

The Noyo Center for Marine Science is presenting a fundraising challenge in March in honor of Whale Festival and the Gray Whale Migration. The organization has the goal to raise \$12,000 to honor the 12,000-mile round trip annual migration of the gray whale (\$1 = 1 mile).

You can symbolically help get a gray whale momma and newborn calf on their 12,000-mile roundtrip journey to the cold-water feeding grounds off Alaska and back. As they leave the warm water birthing lagoons of Mexico and head up the Pacific coast, join our Gray Whale Migration Challenge. Every dollar you donate goes towards ocean conservation, education, and research. Visit [noyocenter.org](http://noyocenter.org) to learn more and donate today.

This fun and educational game will raise money for the Noyo Center for Marine Science's marine mammal research and education programs. Because of a recent increase in deaths, gray whales are under UME (unusual mortality event) designation right now, which requires extra science dedicated to strandings along our coast. This valuable work supports a national effort to manage this species.

To track the progress of our fundraising, instead of using a traditional fundraising thermometer we will create a visual representation of progress by showing a mom and newborn calf moving along the 12,000-mile route based on how much money is raised at the moment (for example: a \$500 donation moves the whales 500 miles on our map). We will share gray whale facts throughout the month as we raise more money.



## What Washed In

by Nancy Lloyd

February brought calmer seas and fewer storms, which allowed Sarah Grimes, with volunteers and interns, to spend more time preparing specimens previously gathered from on our beaches. Noyo Center's marine mammal specimens all belong to the California Academy of Science (CAS, under who's permit we work), and many of the found remains are sent to CAS to be included in their research collection. However, occasionally Noyo Center asks CAS for permission to keep certain marine mammal skeletons for exhibits at the Noyo Center's Discovery Center, the Crow's Nest or at our future Ocean Science Center. These specimens are considered on permanent loan from CAS but remain part of the national database and therefore available for future study.

Noyo Center for Marine Science will celebrate the Whale Festival 2023 on March 11-20 in Fort Bragg. Sarah's team is busy finalizing some recent marine mammal specimens for a temporary public exhibit during the week of March 11-19. Most bones will be disarticulated (separated). Some have never been displayed before.

Here are a few things you can expect to see during the festival:

- Hubb's beaked whale collected last May.
- Full rack of baleen from humpback collected in September, perhaps its flipper too!
- Mandible of our blue whale, should be large!
- Various seals and sea lions.



Beaked whale on the beach



## Did you know?

By Donna Worster

In May, 2022, a Hubbs' beaked whale washed ashore near Jughandle beach. So named for its narrow rostrum, which is similar to a dolphin's beak, it is a very rare specimen because very little is known about their elusive deep-water existence and they very rarely make it to the beach. They are rarely seen in the water either – a beaked whale may be at the surface for just a few minutes and disappear for hours at a time.

This species of beaked whales is named Hubbs' after noted American ichthyologist Carl Leavitt Hubbs (we have nicknamed her "Carla"), who identified this beaked whale as a new species. Carla will be part of the Noyo Center's expanded exhibits during Whale Festival at the Crow's Nest Interpretive Center from March 11-19.



Beaked whale skull out of the soak tank

On a recent sunny afternoon, I was invited to watch her bones being cleaned. Sara Sundberg and Sarah Grimes had taken her from her bathtub soak, which started out in clean clear water in a container the size of a hot tub for six. The water in the soak tank can get quite stinky and must be changed from time to time. With the initial part of the process complete, she is now in a Dawn dish washing liquid (dish soap is used to break down the fatty compounds that make up the grease in the bones) heated bubble bath until her skeleton is ready for a Whale Festival debut. I also learned how the species evolved from a double spout to a single, and how her beak shaped rostrum holds just two lower teeth!

I watched while Sara began to match an epiphyseal (ep i fiz e al) plate to the correct vertebrae. We mammals are born with two plates per vertebrae. You may want to know where they are and how they work. They fit like a unique puzzle piece each to its' own special vertebrae. Epiphyseal plates fuse as mammals age, and interestingly, they fuse first near the tail. Though it is not a way to precisely know ages by observing epiphyseal plates, they do give an indication of general age: young- unfused, old- fused and partially fused in early adulthood. We can approximate the age of our blue whale (about 20 years old) because some epiphyseal bones are attached but most aren't, as is seen at the Crow's Nest exhibit. In talking to a volunteer that helped articulate the orca on display at the Discovery Center, each epiphyseal plate had its own spot on the vertebrae, and it took a considerable amount of care and patience to assemble them appropriately. Analysis of the teeth on this boy helped set his age between 28-32 years old!

## On the River Music Series & Poetry Open Mic at the Slack Tide Cafe

Slack Tide Café is one of the newest musical venues on the Mendocino Coast, presenting the *On the River Music Series* on select Friday and Saturday nights, with music from 4-7P, great food, local wines and beer, and weekly specials. We will continue to host a variety of performers and musical styles throughout the spring and summer months. Visit the [WEBSITE](#) for the full calendar of events and check back for updates. Special thanks to David Alden for working with the musical talent to schedule these events.

The first Poetry Open Mic event will be held on Friday, March 24, beginning at 5P. Marine and aquatic themes encouraged.

Slack Tide Café is open Thursday-Monday, 8A-3P, with extended hours until 7P on Friday and Saturday.

## New! Science Book Club

The Noyo Center is starting a new book club which will focus on books related to marine science or art. Our initial meeting is Sunday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm at the Slack Tide Café. Our first book is *The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins* by Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendel. At this first meeting we will pick our next book and set up a regular time to meet. All are welcome!

### Calendar:

Monday, March 6, 6 pm: Monthly Pinniped Press zoom meeting. All are welcome.  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85988871996>

Monday, March 6, 10A: Red Tide Plankton Collection. Slack Tide Cafe

Wednesday, March 8, 10 am: Monthly Crow's Nest docent's meeting, in person. This meeting will include a gray whale training by Sue Coulter.

Wednesday, March 8, 6:30 pm: Monthly Beach Survey Program zoom meeting.  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81628595428>

Wednesday, March 15, 6:30 pm: Science Talk on Whale Safe program.

Thursday, March 23, 6:30 pm: Science Talk on Mendonoma Gray Whale Research and Observations.

Friday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 5 pm: Poetry Open Mic at Slack Tide Café.

Sunday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2 pm: Science Book Club meeting (see above) at Slack Tide Café.

Monday, March 27, 10A: Red Tide Mussel collecting. MacKerricher State Park-meet at the "Enchanted Trail" (pullout on left just north of Montessori De Mar). Contact Sarah if you have questions or need more information- (707) 813-7925.

### Pinniped Press team:

Carin Berolzheimer, Wendi Felson, Linda Francis, Jeff Jacobsen, Nancy Lloyd, Peggy Martin, Alix Phillips, Toni Rizzo, Jim Rolfe, Ann Russell, Teresa Skarr, Donna Worster with Sarah Grimes, and Trey Petrey. If you have photo or writing skills or have a particular idea for an article or just want to join in with a great group, let me know: [wendi@noyocenter.org](mailto:wendi@noyocenter.org).

Thanks to our contributors to the Pinniped Press and for your support!

