

NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

March 28, 2019

***Photo attached: *Gray whale PCFG #185 spyhopping in N. Puget Sound, by Jill Hein, Orca Network*
*More photos available upon request***

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**GRAY WHALES LOVE THE GHOST SHRIMP BUFFET IN NORTH PUGET SOUND –
Recent Sightings and Strandings signal changes for Washington’s Gray Whales**

The small population of Gray whales known as the North Puget "Sounders" return each year to feast on ghost shrimp in the tidal flats primarily around Whidbey, Camano, and Hat/Gedney Islands, and along Everett and Tulalip. The first Grays usually arrive around early March, but 2018/19 has been an unusual time for these North Puget Sound Grays and some newcomers.

This small group of Gray whales returns to Saratoga Passage and Possession Sound each spring for their annual three-month feeding foray in North Puget Sound, with the first whales typically arriving mid-February to early-March. Cascadia Research of Olympia has been studying this population of Gray whales for decades. In greater Puget Sound, we see up to 12 of this population of Grays per year, some have been seen every year since 1991. The whales are identified by the markings on the underside of their flukes, as well as by the patterns of barnacles, scars, and markings on their backs. Patch, or #49, was among the first identified by Cascadia in our local waters in 1991 and is a favorite of many local whale watchers, as he is easily identifiable by the large white patch on his right side, as well as white patches on the underside of his flukes.

Last spring, we had three "new" whales join our usual dozen local grays - two were previously unknown to Cascadia Research, who has researched these whales since the early 90s, and the other was PCFG185, from the Pacific Coast Feeding Group. New members have joined the N Puget Sound grays before, but this year they not only joined them for the usual spring brunch of ghost shrimp in Possession Sound and Saratoga Passage – they stayed all year. One hasn't been sighted since November, but two remained in the area during the time of year they normally would have migrated to Baja, and are now again feeding along with the "Sounders", the first arriving January 11th, six to eight weeks early. So far the following "Sounders" have been sighted and identified in North Puget Sound already this year: #22, 44, 49, 53, 56, 185, 383, 531, and 2246, with several others in the process of being identified.

John Calambokidis of Cascadia Research shared with us "This is certainly an interesting new development this year. I suspect this may say something about prey resources elsewhere (or difficulties there). There have been some changes in both the sightings and strandings of migrating gray whale occurrence elsewhere in Washington State and in the PCFG (Pacific Coast Feeding Group) distribution and numbers in some of their regular areas the last two years as well."

Through a collaborative effort, Cascadia Research and Orca Network have published a laminated ID guide of the North Puget Sound Gray whales, to help whale watchers identify the whales they are watching, and to learn more about each individual whale in this unique, small group of Gray whales who are much beloved seasonal visitors. The guide is available for sale from the Langley Whale Center, as well as the Orca Network webshop: http://shop.orcanetwork.org/product_p/graywhaleguide.htm

To learn more about Gray whales, visit Orca Network's Gray Whale website page: <http://orcanetwork.org/nathist/Graywhales.html> and the Cascadia Research website: <http://www.cascadiaresearch.org/washington-state-north-puget-sound-gray-whale-photo-id-and-feeding-study-cascadia-research-studies>

The annual spring visit of Gray whales provides an excellent opportunity to view whales from the shorelines of Island and Snohomish counties, or from the Mukilteo/Clinton ferries, much to the delight of residents and visitors alike. Orca Network provides a **Whale Sighting Viewpoints Map** to help watchers find the best locations for viewing whales from shore at our **Langley Whale Center** and on our website: http://www.orcanetwork.org/Main/index.php?categories_file=Viewpoints.

To get the latest information on where the whales are, "Like" and "Follow" Orca Network's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/OrcaNetwork> where current whale sightings are posted, along with news, events,

and information about the whales of our region.

Alert to boaters: All boaters in the North Puget Sound area should take extra caution and go slow during the spring Gray whale season (March – early May). Gray whales (and humpbacks) are often difficult to see or predict where they will surface next, so be alert for whales and give them lots of space. For more information and to view responsible whale watching guidelines visit: www.BeWhaleWise.org.

REPORT A SIGHTING:

Whale sightings from the public provide important information about the travels of the whales, and timely reports enable Orca Network to alert researchers who can then obtain photo/video identification and samples from the whales during their time in Puget Sound.

Please include the following:

- Date/Time
- Species (If uncertain please list as such and describe)
- Whale (s) location
- Number of Whales
- Direction of Travel
- Observed behaviors (traveling, feeding, breaching, etc.)

All sightings are in turn shared with researchers, agencies, and the public through our Whale Sightings Email list, Orca Network website and Facebook and Twitter pages, and at our Langley Whale Center.

Where to report:

- Post directly to Orca Network's Facebook page (link above)
- Call 360-331-3543
- email info@orcaneetwork.org
- web form on our website at http://www.orcaneetwork.org/Main/index.php?categories_file=Contact

Orca Network's Whale Sighting Network has followed the travels of these whales, as well as other whales in our region for decades, and since March 2014 our Langley Whale Center has provided a great venue to learn more about the whales. The Whale Center is located at 105 Anthes in Langley on south Whidbey Island, one block up from "Whale Bell Park," where the Whale Bell is rung whenever someone spots a whale in the area.

The Langley Whale Center, open Thursdays – Mondays, also features displays and videos about Gray whales, Orcas and the many other marine mammals of the Salish Sea. Cascadia Research has designed an exhibit for the Langley Whale Center describing the Gray whales in North Puget Sound and the research Cascadia has conducted. Also on display is a gray whale skull, Fin whale skull, and other marine mammal skeletal and specimen displays collected and prepared by Orca Network's Central Puget Sound Marine Mammal Stranding Network. Visit the Langley Whale Center's Facebook page for more information: <https://www.facebook.com/LangleyWhaleCenter>

Welcome the Whales Festival April 13 – 14, 2019

On Saturday and Sunday, April 13 - 14, don't miss the annual "Welcome the Whales Parade and Festival" in Langley to honor and celebrate the arrival of Gray whales to Whidbey Island. Welcome the Whales Festival is sponsored by Orca Network and the Langley Chamber of Commerce. For the complete schedule and more information about Welcome the Whales weekend or Orca Network's Whale Sighting Network, visit our website at www.OrcaNetwork.org

Cascadia Research has conducted scientific research and education for the past 38 years. Since incorporation in 1979, Cascadia Research has received grants and contracts, primarily from government agencies, to pursue research in a variety of areas, mostly in the fields of marine mammal and bird biology,

animal behavior, ecology, and pollution ecology. Cascadia also makes educational presentations to a variety of audiences from technical talks to scientists to presentations to elementary school children. Based out of offices in downtown Olympia, Cascadia has conducted field research in the Canadian Arctic, Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawai'i, Mexico, and the waters off Central America. Visit our website at: www.CascadiaResearch.org and Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CascadiaResearch/videos>

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