

The Southern Resident Community

82 members present as of July 2013



J pod has 26 individuals

K pod has 19 individuals

L pod has 37 individuals

In the 1960's and '70's, about 45 orcas were captured from the Southern Resident Community and delivered to marine parks, and at least a dozen more were killed during the captures.

The population was 71 when the Southern Residents were first surveyed in 1976 after the captures ended. The population peaked at about 98 whales in 1995, then dipped to 79 in 2001, rose to 90 in 2006 and has now dropped to 82, not counting Lolita at the Miami Seaquarium, the lone survivor of all the whales captured from the Southern Resident Community.

Luna/L98 died in a tugboat accident March 2006 after nearly 5 years alone in Nootka Sound, B.C.

"Lolita" an L pod member living but not present, captured off Whidbey Island, at Miami Seaquarium since 1970.

Historically, J pod has been observed in the Salish Sea waters year-round, with K and L pods departing the inland sea in October/November, to return in May or June. However, since 1999, K and L pods have also remained in Salish Sea waters into December, January or February. K & L pods have been observed off the California coast during winter months often for the past 13 years.

Endangered Species Listing Process & Status

In 2001, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) listed the Southern Resident Community orcas as Endangered.

In May 2001, NOAA Fisheries received a petition to list and designate the Southern Resident Community (SRC) under the US Endangered Species Act. NOAA Fisheries reviewed the petition. In June 2002, NOAA Fisheries announced that an ESA listing was not warranted for the SRC because they do not constitute a "species" as defined in the ESA: they are not a species, subspecies, or distinct population segment.

In May 2003, NOAA Fisheries designated the Southern Resident Community of orcas as "Depleted" under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and began work on a conservation plan, following guidelines similar to those for an ESA listing, but with less enforcement powers.

In January 2004 a Federal Court ordered NOAA Fisheries to revisit their decision not to list the Southern Resident orcas as Endangered under the ESA.

April 3, 2004 Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife declares all Salish Sea orcas "Endangered", including the Southern Resident Pods, Transient orcas and Offshore orcas.

On November 15, 2005, NOAA Fisheries listed the Southern Resident orcas as "Endangered" under the ESA. Critical Habitat Plan & Orca Recovery Plans are developed. More info at: www.nwr.noaa.gov

Information courtesy of the Center for Whale Research, Orca Network, and NOAA Fisheries

Some fascinating facts about orcas

- Newborn orcas are 7-8 feet long, 3-400 lbs.; adult females are 17-24 feet, 5-9,000 lbs; adult males are 22-30 feet, 8-12,000 lbs.
- Males grow to an average of 27 feet and 9,000 pounds.
- Females grow to an average of 24 feet and 7,000 pounds.
- Orcas have a 16-17 month gestation period.
- Maximum longevity for males is 60+; for females 90+
- Southern resident males usually live into their 30s and females into their 50s.
- An adult orca consumes 100-300 pounds of food a day, depending on size and energy needs.
- The brain of an adult orca may weigh 12-15 pounds, or about four times the size of human brains.
- Like all whales, orcas are voluntary breathers and need to be at least “half awake” at all times. Their brain has the ability to split activities so they sleep with half their brain while the other half keeps the body still breathing.
- Orcas are the largest members of the dolphin family, or delphinidae.
- Like all dolphins, orcas use sophisticated biological sonar, called echolocation.
- Orcas are found throughout the world’s oceans, but tend to prefer the cooler, more productive polar and temperate waters.
- Orcas can swim up to 30 mph and can travel 75-100 miles or more per day.
- Orcas have no predators.
- Orcas live in matrilineal family groups presumably led by elder matriarchs. Two or more matrilineal groups may form a pod.
- Both male and female offspring typically remain with their maternal family for life.
- Genetic evidence indicates that mating occurs between, and not within, pods.
- A pod’s or maternal family’s unique repertoire of calls is called a dialect.
- The J, K and L pods, which frequent Puget Sound, are known as the southern resident community.
- Each orca in the Southern Resident community is photographically identified each year by the shape of the dorsal fin, as well as shape of gray markings, called the “saddle patch” behind the dorsal fin.
- Several pods may belong to a clan that shares certain vocalizations, and several clans may associate as a community.
- Often when pods of the same clan or community meet after separation, they physically intermingle and engage in vigorous surface activity, accompanied by almost nonstop vocalizations.
- Communities remain apart from one another, generally staying in separate habitats and using completely distinct vocalizations.
- A wide variety of types of orcas have been observed, including “residents,” which eat only fish, “transients,” which eat only mammals, and “offshores,” found several miles from shore, but not all orca communities worldwide may fit those descriptions.

