

Summary Gray Whale Strandings in 2010: California, Oregon, and Washington

Robert L. Brownell, Jr.

Introduction

North American (from Baja California, Mexico to Alaska) strandings of gray whales between 1975 and 2006 totaled 1,892 animals during the period 1975-2006 (Brownell *et al.* 2007). Searching effort varied between years in some regions (Alaska, British Columbia, and Baja California). Therefore, the annual strandings of gray whales in the core region (California, Oregon and Washington) were summed to examine the change in mortality patterns over the study period. During unusual mortality event in 1999 and 2000, the number stranded in the core region was 74 and 84, respectively. Between 2001 and 2006, the average number of dead gray whales in the core region was 17. This paper is a review of all gray whale stranding in the core region of the United States between 1 January 2010 and 31 May 2010.

Methods

Stranding data from California, Oregon and Washington were provided by Joe Cordero, Jim Rice and John Calambokidis, respectively. For the Washington state data check the Cascadia web site at: <http://www.cascadiaresearch.org/Gray%20Whale%20Deaths-April%202010.htm>

Results

Below is a listing of the 18 gray whales that have stranded in the core region (California, Oregon and Washington) during the first five months of 2010.

--California

14 January, 2.25 miles north of Trinidad, Humboldt County, 12.6 m male.

30 January, floating off San Miguel Island

1 February, Dry Lagoon Beach, Humboldt County. 8.2 m female. This specimen has an old wound on its back with a harpoon imbedded in the site.

4 February, U.S. Naval Mole, Los Angeles Harbor, Los Angeles County, 4.5 m female. This specimen was a ship strike.

17 February, a 4.5 m female found on Goleta Beach, Santa Barbara Count.

20 April, a male 25 ft found dead near Fort Mason, San Francisco Bay

21 April Timber Cove, 12.7 m female dead north of Fort Ross, Sonoma County.

12 May, a 11.6 m female stranded dead on Angel Island near the ferry building, San Francisco Bay.

14 May, a 7.9 m animal dead of unknown sex dead on Doheny State Beach, Orange County. This whale was first reported on 11 May near the entrance to Dana Point Harbor with fishing gear wrapped around it tail. The gear was successfully removed but the whale died after a few days and washed ashore.

17 May, one mile off of Angel Island State Beach, floating carcass of male specimen in San Francisco Bay.

--Oregon

16 April 2010, 27 foot male, stranded dead Clatsop Beach [north of Gearhart] and examined by Debbie Duffield. Reported to “have been caught in rope from crab pots and drowned”(Beachconnection.net [Oregon Coast Beach Connection]18IV2010)

23 May, a male 1230 cm stranded dead ca. 3 miles south of Waldport, Lincoln County (KGW.com about 10 miles south of Newport according to Mate in email 26 May to RLB)

--Washington

9 February, dead calf examined on Washington outer coast (CRC 1025)

4 April, a 26 foot whale stranded live at Deer Creek, near Shelton (CRC 1034)

11 April, a 40 foot adult female found near Fidalgo Island and towed to shore (10Er11AprSK-01)

10 April, a juvenile male found dead in Samish Bay, Samish Island, Skagit County (10Er12AprSK-02)

14 April, a “female, about 30 feet” stranded dead on Arroyo Beach, near Fauntleroy ferry terminal, West Seattle (CRC-1035)

Mid May, confirmed gray whale stranded on outer coast but no details yet on this specimen.

End May floater on outer cost “could be a gray whale” but not counted yet as gray whale

Discussion

At least four of the eleven dead gray whales that stranded or found floating in California were assumed to be human-related. Cascadia Research reported, that so far this year, six dead gray whales have washed up on Washington's coast. All the whales appeared to be thin and undernourished, which is common during their migration. The death of at least one of the two

dead gray whales in Oregon was human related (fishing gear). Therefore, at least five of the 18 dead gray whales reported in 2010 are known to be human-related

The mean of the annual numbers of gray whale strandings in California from 2001 – 2009 is 9.1 whales and low and high number during this period was 5 and 18. In 2010, the number of gray whale strandings as of 31 May was 10. Within the core region (California, Oregon and Washington) the annual number of dead gray whales between 2001 and 2006 was 17. Therefore, the total dead (18) so far in 2010 in the core region is same as the period between 2001 and 2006. A few more gray whales may strand in the core region during June 2010 but the number is expected to be very small.

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References

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