

MEDIA RELEASE

Designated Corporation for Scientific Whale Research

THE INSTITUTE OF CETACEAN RESEARCH

July 26, 2023

2023 IWC/Japan Joint Cetacean Sighting Survey Cruise in the North Pacific – Departure of the IWC-POWER research vessel

1. Background

This survey is conducted jointly by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and Japan, and is commonly referred to as IWC-POWER (International Whaling Commission/Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research). IWC-POWER is the successor of IWC/SOWER (International Whaling Commission Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research), a successful whale research program acclaimed globally, which was conducted in the Antarctic Ocean from 1996/1997 to 2009/2010. Taking advantage of the know-how, experience and achievements of IWC/SOWER, IWC-POWER has been carried out every summer since 2010 based on the main research plan of the IWC Scientific Committee.

For the past thirteen years, the IWC-POWER research cruises have been covering a wide area of the North Pacific that had not been surveyed for several decades, finding large numbers of fin and sei whales in the Gulf of Alaska area north of 40 degrees north latitude and a large number of Bryde's and sperm whales in waters south of 40 degrees N, and valuable data have been collected to contribute to objective stock assessment of these species. In addition, distribution information on rare species such as blue whales and right whales has also been collected.

As the 14th cruise, this time we will conduct a survey in the waters south of the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands (beyond the U.S. exclusive economic zone: waters from north of 40 degrees north latitude and between 180 degrees east longitude and 155 degrees west longitude), from July 28 to October 5. The survey will be conducted by a total of four researchers, two each from U.S. and from Japan.

2. Outline of the 2023 Research Cruise

The IWC-POWER program is conducted collaboratively by the IWC and the Government of Japan. The IWC Scientific Committee has developed the research program and established the IWC-POWER Steering Group (Convenor: Koji Matsuoka, ICR), which has a role of designing the research plan and analyzing the results of the cruises. The Institute of Cetacean Research, under the commission of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, carries out the IWC-POWER cruises. The outline of this year's survey plan is as follows:

2.1 Main objectives

- (1) Collection of information for the in-depth stock assessment of sei whales, humpback whales and gray whales.
- (2) Collection of data on distribution and stock structure of the rare North Pacific right and blue whales.
- (3) Collection of data on abundance and stock structure of other whale resources with

insufficient resource information.

- (4) Collection of basic information, including oceanographic (sea water temperature, marine debris, etc.) necessary for the development of the medium- to long-term plan of this research program.

2.2 Research Cruise Period

From July 28 to October 5, 2023 (70 days)

2.3 Research Area

Waters beyond the U.S. exclusive economic zone from north of 40 degrees north latitude and between 180 degrees east longitude and 155 west longitude (Figure 1). The research vessel will call at the port of Dutch Harbor, Alaska to embark and disembark U.S. researchers and to load and unload survey materials.

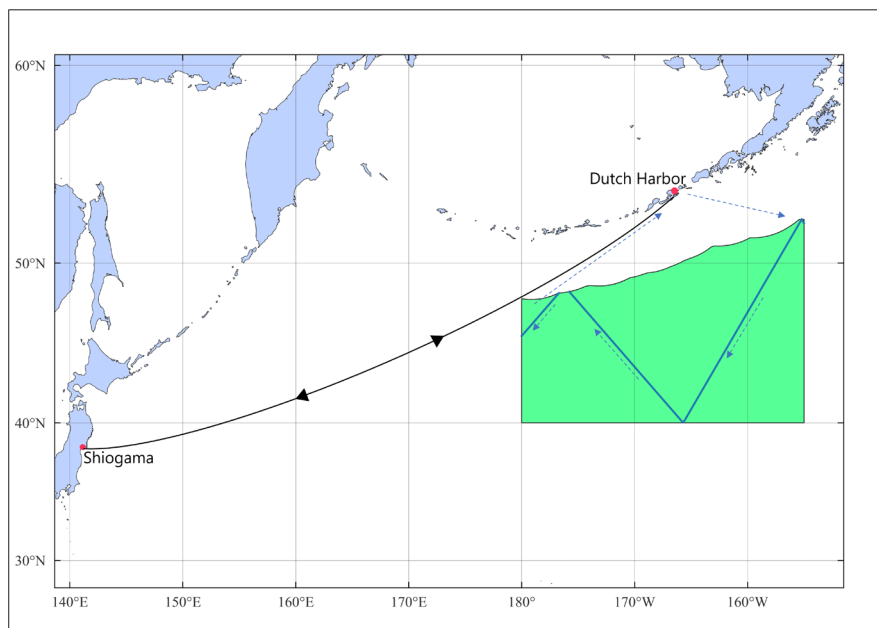


Figure 1. 2023 IWC-POWER survey area (green; high seas), and survey course (blue bold lines), and round-trip voyage (black-arrowed line).

2.4 International Researchers

The survey will be conducted by the following international researchers appointed by the IWC Scientific Committee.

Hiroto Murase (Cruise leader, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, Japan)

Jessica Crance (Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA/AFSC, USA)

Bernardo Alps (Southwest Fisheries Science Center, NOAA/SWFSC, USA)

Isamu Yoshimura (IWC-nominated international researcher, Japan)

2.5 Research vessel

Yushin-Maru No. 2 (747 tons, Captain Chikamasa Okoshi, 16 crewmen).

2.6 Operating body

The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR, Japan)

Photographs from previous IWC-POWER cruises (Copyright IWC/ICR).



Blue whale breathing at sea surface (2022)



Biopsy sample collection from a sei whale (2020)



Fin whale surfacing (2021)



Caudal fin of a humpback whale photographed near the Aleutian Islands (2022)

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