

MEDIA RELEASE

Designated Corporation for Scientific Whale Research
THE INSTITUTE OF CETACEAN RESEARCH
October 7, 2024

Completion of the 2024 IWC/Japan Joint Cetacean Sighting Survey Cruise in the North Pacific – IWC-POWER

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. In the IWC69 Commission Meeting, the IWC secretariat and IWC Scientific Committee expressed gratitude to Japan for contributing to sending research vessels, crew members, and researchers.

For the past fourteen years, the IWC-POWER research cruises have widely surveyed mainly the Northeast Pacific and 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 15th cruise, with the generous cooperation of the U.S. government, this time we conducted a survey for the first time in the Arctic Ocean (southern part of the Chukchi Sea: within the U.S. EEZ), as well as in the eastern Bering Sea (south of 69th parallel N latitude, north of the Aleutian Islands, east of 175° W longitude, and west of the 155° W longitude line, within the exclusive economic zone of the United States), from August 2 to October 10. The survey was conducted by a total of four researchers, two each from U.S. and from Japan.

2. Outline of the 2024 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 survey was commissioned by the Fisheries Agency of Japan, and conducted by the Institute in cooperation with the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology (TUMSAT), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Alaska Fisheries Science Center (NOAA/AFSC), and other related organizations. Many gray whales and fin whales and other whale species were found in the research area. The whales were photographed for identification, biopsy (skin and blubber) samples were collected for DNA analysis, and satellite tags were attached to the whales to record their migration and diving

behavior. Detailed results of the research will be presented at the IWC/SC annual meeting and other international organizations (the results introduced here are preliminary figures).

2.1 Main objectives

- (1) Collection of information for the in-depth stock assessment of humpback whales and gray whales.
- (2) Collection of data on distribution and stock structure of the rare North Pacific right whale.
- (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 August 2 to October 10, 2024 (70 days)

2.3 Research Area

Waters part of the Chukchi Sea and of the Bering Sea in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (Figure 1). The research vessel called at the port of Dutch Harbor, Alaska, to disembark U.S. researchers and to load and unload survey materials.

2.4 International Researchers

The survey was 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)

Peter Duley (Northeast Fisheries Science Center, NOAA/NEFSC, USA)

Isamu Yoshimura (IWC-nominated international researcher, Japan)

2.5 Research vessel

Yushin-Maru No. 2 (747 tons, Captain Hidenori Kasai, 16 crewmen).

2.6 Total Distance Covered

1,253 nautical miles (approximately 2,320km).

2.7 Main whale sightings

Gray whale (44 groups, 78 animals), fin whale (85 groups, 156 animals), sei whale (12 groups, 14 animals), minke whale (5 groups, 6 animals), humpback whale (23 groups, 42 animals), bowhead whale (1 group, 1 animal), sperm whale (5 groups, 5 animals), killer whale (19 groups, 87 animals).

2.8 Results of sample collection and other experiments

(1) Photo identification data (number of individuals)

Gray whale: 5 animals, fin whale: 34 animals, humpback whale: 14 animals, bowhead whale: 1 animal, killer whale: 10 animals.

(2) Collection of biopsy samples (number of animals)

Gray whale: 3 animals, fin whale: 7 animals, sei whale: 2 animals, humpback whale: 8 animals, killer whale: 1 animal.

(3) Whale vocalization recording (number of animals)

We conducted 545 hours of acoustic monitoring at 160 stations and recorded the vocalization

sounds of North Pacific right, gray, fin, humpback sperm, and killer whales.

(4) Marine debris (number observed)

We recorded 14 cases of marine debris in the research area.

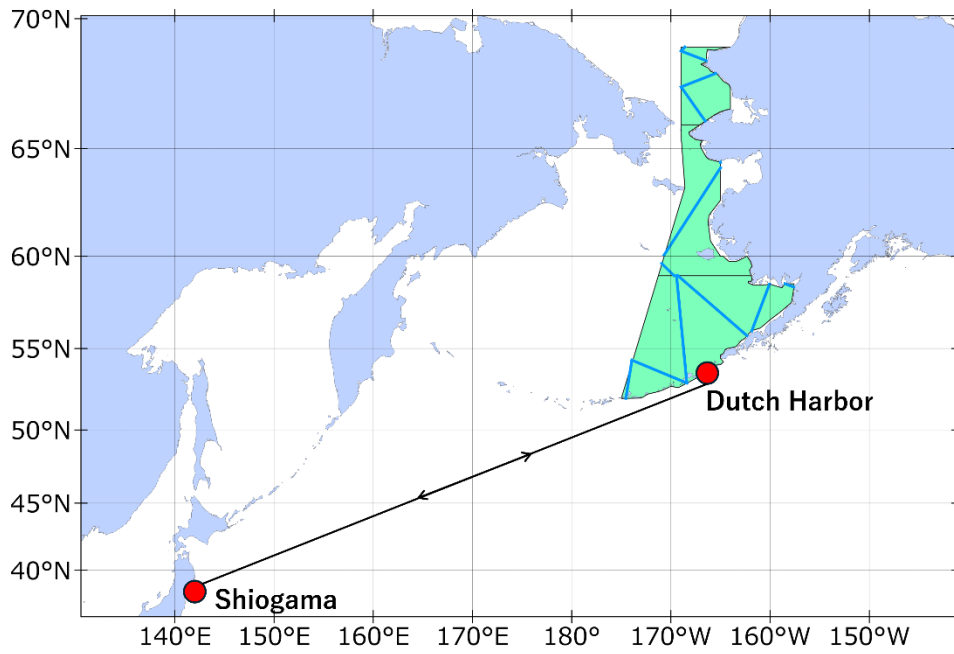


Fig. 1. 2024 IWC-POWER survey area (green), and survey course (blue bold lines).

Photographs from the 2024 IWC-POWER cruise



Fin whale showing its dorsal fin.



Humpback whale striking the water surface with its tail fin.



Gray whale diving with its tail fin up.



Group of killer whales.



Yushin-Maru No. 2 leaving Dutch Harbor.

END