

Foreword

It is a pleasure for me to introduce the eighth issue of the Technical Reports of the Institute of Cetacean Research (TEREP-ICR-8). TEREP-ICR describes and reports on the process, progress, and results of technical or scientific research on whales and their environment, as well as the field activities and state of current research surveys conducted by the ICR, both in the North Pacific and the Antarctic Oceans.

The definitive return of the in-person mode of work in the post-pandemic period facilitated the research activities carried out in 2024, including field surveys, laboratory work and analyses, writing of papers and participation in national and international meetings. This, in turn, enabled the ICR to make a significant contribution to whale science during this year as shown in this issue of TEREP-ICR.

To facilitate the research work on cetaceans, the ICR has undergone reorganization in 2024 and now has two Research Departments under the Survey and Research Division. The first department deals with studies directly relevant for assessment and management, while the second department deals with studies on biological and ecological topics which can be used as indicators of the health, condition and role of whales in the ecosystem. Furthermore, the ICR in 2024 expanded into two offices, Tokyo Office and Taiji Office. All laboratories dedicated to aspects of biology, genetics, feeding ecology, and chemicals of cetaceans are located at the Taiji Office. I trust that this new organizational structure at the ICR will allow more comprehensive and innovative research on cetaceans with a focus on their conservation and management.

I would like to highlight three of ICR's activities in 2024 that involved international research collaboration. Firstly, in March 2024, a German researcher completed a successful one-year post-doctoral stay at the ICR which was the first experience of this kind for our institute. The main objective of the post-doctoral stay was the development and establishment of a new genetic marker (Single Nucleotide Polymorphism or SNP), which is now available for the use in studies on population genomic structure in baleen whale species by the ICR genetic team (see a report of the post-doctoral research in this issue). Secondly, in February 2024 a training course for the SNP genetic marker was carried out by a German researcher at the ICR Taiji Office's genetic laboratory. This activity was accompanied by a successful international workshop on the use of genetic data for whales' stock identification purposes, with the participation of international experts from Norway, Iceland, Germany and Japan. Finally, a Chilean scientist participated successfully in the 2023/24 survey of the JASS-A program in the Antarctic Ocean enabling a path for further research collaboration on whales between his institute in Chile and ICR (see commentary article in this issue). I hope that activities involving international research collaboration will increase in the future.

The previous TEREP-ICR-7 was widely distributed both in Japan and other countries. There is good evidence that TEREP-ICR is on course towards achieving its objectives. At the same time, TEREP-ICR has been providing valuable opportunities for our scientists to compile and summarize their research conducted over the years, as a precursor to submitting their works for publication in peer-reviewed journals (see some examples of publications in the list of peer-reviewed papers in this TEREP issue).

It is my sincere hope that this eighth issue of the TEREP-ICR will contribute further to an increased understanding among national and international scientific communities of the technical and research activities on whales and their ecosystem conducted by the ICR.

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