

The Mariner



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Ideas on Improving Fish Stocks & Ocean Habitats

Straight “Poop” on Marine Plumbing

Fin Whales and Gray Whales in Local Waters

Dock Construction Report

Much More!

A MAGAZINE FOR THE MARINA DEL REY BOATING COMMUNITY



Whale Report

Gray, Fin & Humpback Whales Sighted Locally

By Pat Reynolds



Photo Pat Reynolds

A fin whale surfaces off the coast of Redondo Beach. The fin whale is the second largest whale in the world, reaching lengths of 80-85 feet

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A large, detailed white rose on a stem, positioned in the upper right corner of the advertisement.

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A glass bottle with a decorative stopper, positioned in the lower right corner of the advertisement.

This past month I have ventured out to drift in front of the Pt. Vicente lighthouse a few times to see if I could get a glimpse and take a shot of some of the migrating gray whales that are making their way past our area either en-route or returning from the warmer waters of Mexico where they handle their birthing business. It's said to be the longest migration of any mammal, some 10,000-12,000 miles round-trip, and I looked forward to witnessing one or two pass through.

After monitoring the info on the American Cetacean Society/LA Gray Whale Census and Behavior Project website it indicated around 7-10 gray whale sightings per-day in the same location, so I thought my chances were pretty good – not so.

Although I know many boaters in these parts have seen gray whales many times around this time of year, I have only seen one – the juvenile gray that was loitering around Ballona Creek a few years back. But that one was in a bit of a different category – no one was sure if that whale was okay. The behavior

was abnormal and experts were watching with concern as the animal hung around day after day, not adhering to what gray whales ordinarily do.

I have seen one breach during a sail back from Mexico and saw a spout off in the distance while sailing in El Segundo once, but never a solid look at the traveling barnacled beast making the stoic and steadfast passage.

However, during one of my trips I was awarded a more than fair consolation. As I sat silently in the Redondo Canyon looking for a distant gray whale spout and listening for the unmistakable sound of whale lungs sucking air, I was jolted out of my perch. A deep loud gasp followed by the enormous back of a whale, that I knew was not a gray, surfaced 150-feet from my 14-foot inflatable.

It looked like a blue whale but darker in color. Later I learned it was a fin whale – the second largest animal on earth behind the blue. Although, like the blue, they are an endangered species, there have been quite a few local sightings. The local chapter of the ACS recently reported seeing 14 one afternoon, stating: “At one point we counted fourteen different fin whales and there may

have been more. It seemed like there was never a time when we were not watching fin whales.”

For those interested in taking the boat out and witnessing these behemoths, be they grays, fin or even humpbacks have been sighted – caution and respect is the key. Local marine biologist Maddalena Bearzi, founder of the Ocean Conservation Society and author of numerous books about our local marine mammal population urges boaters, paddle-boarders and kayakers to be thoughtful and careful when in the vicinity of these animals in the wild.

“Many people don't know that these whales are protected or that getting too close can potentially cause harm to these magnificent animals,” said Bearzi. “In the last week, paddle boarders and surfers were literally ‘over’ the whales for an up-close view of these animals and many boaters crowded their feeding areas. Whales and dolphins are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and surfers, paddle borders, boaters and whale watchers need to pay careful attention when approaching whales. It's a violation of federal law to harass or harm them and penalties can include up to one-year imprisonment and fines of up to \$20,000.”



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