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Malibu News

More Dolphins And Whales In Santa Monica Bay

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Posted by Megan Leong on Apr 27, 2014 - 1:22:17 AM



Bottlenose dolphin jumping off Point Vicente, California (@mbearzi/OCS under NOAA permit).

(<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2014/04/24/how-to-view-marine-mammals-responsibly/>), Dr. Bearzi states that the 2013-2014 season has brought more gray whale sightings than ever off Los Angeles, with a record number of 370 whales in December 2013.

This number doubled the sightings of the previous year during the same time period. In recent years, she has catalogued a large number of blue whales, fin whales, minke whales, sperm whales, humpback whales, and several species of dolphins frequenting the bay. Dr. Bearzi also mentioned in her article that the rise in the numbers of these animals "is not due to a population boom. It is likely a combination of different factors that contribute to this shift in whale and dolphin presence, including changes in oceanographic conditions and, consequently, availability of prey."

In a scientific paper entitled "Skin Lesions and Physical Deformities of Coastal and Offshore Common Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Santa Monica Bay and Adjacent Areas, California", Dr. Bearzi and her OCS research team examined the skin conditions of local dolphins to determine their health status.

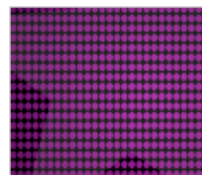
This was the first study of its kind on the West coast of the United States. The team collected their data by using photo-identification of individuals. As explained in Bearzi's non-profit website, each dolphin's fin also act as a human "fingerprint" that can tell researchers the identity of almost every individual in a school. The paper results show that "skin lesions affect a large portion of the coastal and offshore dolphin populations in the study area. When considering that lesions and physical deformities can be a sign of disease and may be related to anthropogenic factors, their high presence on dolphins must be a cause of concern [to humans]."

MALIBU—More dolphins and whales have been sighted feeding off the coast of Southern California in recent times, according to marine biologists Dr. Maddalena Bearzi and Capt. Charles Saylan of Ocean Conservation Society. In her article for the National Geographic entitled "How to View Marine Mammals Responsibly"



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**Blue whale surfacing near Point Dume, California
(©mbearzi/OCS under NOAA permit)**

Dr. Bearzi and Capt. Saylan are the co-founders of the Ocean Conservation Society, which serves to protect the oceans through scientific research and educational programs. OCS also offers ways for the community to help the oceans with campaigns such as "Adopt-A-Dolphin."

Individuals can "adopt" one of six wild bottlenose dolphins with a tax-deductible minimum donation of \$50, or \$100 to receive an 18-inch Pillow Pets dolphin. Dr. Bearzi has told Canyon News that she would like our readers to know specifically about the "Be Whale Aware" campaign, which promotes awareness and safe-viewing of marine mammals off the coast of Southern California. Safety and legal guidelines for viewing these mammals can be obtained from the OCS website in PDF formats here: <http://www.oceanconservation.org/education/be-whale-aware/index.html>.

It is important for the public to know this information considering the increasing numbers of whales and dolphins frequenting the area, so that harm can be prevented on both sides.

Dr. Bearzi has also informed us that "Ocean Conservation Society is searching for funding to support its research and conservation work. We have several research projects going on right now and our work at sea is expensive to carry on.

OCS is looking for donors as well as donations (in particular powerboats over 30 feet or sailboats over 45 feet) to continue the ongoing monitoring in the bay as well as all our research & conservation projects." Boat, equipment, cash or other donations to the organization can be made through the OCS website at <http://www.oceanconservation.org/>.