

# Whale Tales

An annual newsletter of  
Brier Island Whale & Seabird Cruises' Research Division  
Summer-Fall 2010



## AN UNFORGETTABLE SEASON

What started out as a rather mundane season, turned out to be the best that we have ever experienced. The biggest news for the 2010 season was the sale of the Cetacean Search which we replaced by a Zodiac™ SRMN 730 which we named Cetacean Adventure. This vessel turned out to be advantageous as its speed enabled us to get to the whales much faster, allowing for more time spent observing them. It also served as a scout boat, seeking out locations of the whales for the whale watch boat, Mega Nova, when the Cetacean Adventure was not scheduled for a whale watch run. 🐋

The 2010 season marked our 27<sup>th</sup> year of cetacean research in the lower portion of the Bay of Fundy. We documented 10 different species in the 5 month season. They were: North Atlantic right whales, fin whales, humpback whales, minke whales, a sperm Whale, an orca, pilot whales,

Atlantic White Sided Dolphins, Atlantic White Beaked Dolphins, and Harbor Porpoises. An outstanding compilation, especially the sightings of the Orca and Sperm whale which are not indigenous to the Bay.

We also documented 15 Humpback Whale calves in our region as well as 155 known individuals and 16 individuals that have yet to be identified.

There were also a number of North Atlantic Right Whale calves that visited our area as well. There was even a sighting of a mother and calf pair in Grand Passage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research division of Brier Island Whale and Seabird Cruises would especially like to thank the Veronika Crawford Foundation from Bern, Switzerland for their very kind donation. Words cannot express how grateful we are for their support. Our readers will recall from last year's newsletter how Veronika paid us a visit and was instantly in awe of the whales of the Bay of Fundy and has remembered us very kindly.

We would also like to thank everyone who chose us for their whale watching adventure as part of your ticket fare was allocated toward research costs. A big thank you goes out to our whale sponsors, who through choosing to adopt a humpback, helped us to monitor these great mammals to aid in their survival in the Bay. 🐋

## ADOPTION UPDATES

**Arch** was sighted once during the 2010 season. He was seen by another whale watch operator on Northwest Ledge in late June.

**Baton** was sighted several times over the season, the first being on July 24 and he was accompanied by Blanco, another adult male. The most memorable of his sightings was on August 1<sup>st</sup>, when he, Lagoon and NAHWC 0034 approached our whale watch boat. All three of these whales are not known to be curious individuals so it was a spectacular sighting!



**Crevasse** and **Doublet** once again, were not sighted in 2010.

**Flash** returned to the Bay of Fundy on July 8<sup>th</sup> and we were delighted to see that she brought her 7<sup>th</sup> calf (that we know of) with her! Flash and her calf delighted us throughout the season with displays of various humpback whale behaviours, such as breaching, flipper slapping, tail lobbing and tail breaching. The last sighting of this pair was on September 18, 2010. We also recorded sightings of Flash's 2007 calf, whose name is Buckle.

**Flyer** was not sighted by our researchers but our colleagues from the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies saw him on the other side of the Bay of Fundy.

We were thrilled to see **Foggy** return to the Bay of Fundy on August 3<sup>rd</sup> with her fourth calf. She was escorted by Pylon, an adult male. Foggy and her calf were sighted throughout the month of August. The last sighting of this mother and calf pair was on September 12.

**Mr. Burns (Ibex)** was only sighted one time during the 2010 season, on June 22 and he was 15 miles northwest of Brier Island.


**Peedee** was not sighted in 2010.

**Rooftop** was first sighted in the 2010 season on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. She was with Quote and her calf and was surface feeding on the abundance of krill that was found at an area called the "Bear Cove Ground". She was sighted frequently during the season. The last time we saw her was on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Perhaps 2011 will see her with a calf of her own!

We were very excited to see **Shuttle** on August 13<sup>th</sup> as she brought her fourth calf to the Bay of Fundy. We didn't see her very often in 2010 but when we did, the calf entertained us with close approaches to the boat, making for some very memorable whale watching!

**Tab** was sighted by another whale watch on Northwest Ledge in September 2010. At the time, he was occupied with lunge feeding on the herring and krill that could be found there.

During the winter of 2011, we will be adding **Peajack** to the list of whales that can be adopted. Stay tuned!

To support our research by adopting a Bay of Fundy Humpback whale, please call us at 1-800-656-3660 or visit our website at [www.brierislandwhalewatch.com](http://www.brierislandwhalewatch.com) 



## 2010 Humpback Sightings

|                   |                  |                 |                    |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Amulet*           | Filigree         | Magpie          | Scream             |
| Anchor*           | Fist             | Mallard         | Shark              |
| Badge             | Flame            | Meteor          | Shuttle            |
| Baton             | Flamingo         | Milkyway        | Shuttle 10 calf    |
| Blanco            | Flamingo 10 calf | Mocha           | Slingshot          |
| Bottleneck        | Flash            | Mocha 10 calf   | Slumber            |
| Buckle            | Flash 10 calf    | Mogul           | Sockeye            |
| Bungee            | Foggy            | Monarch*        | Southpaw           |
| Bungee 10 calf    | Foggy 10 calf    | New Moon        | Spar 08 calf       |
| Cacophony         | Froth            | Orion           | Sprig              |
| Calanus           | Galapagos        | Paravane        | Squiggle           |
| Capella           | Grand Manan      | Partition       | Stalagmite         |
| Cat's Paw 08 calf | Gremlin          | Patches         | Stalagmite 10 calf |
| Chablis           | Grommet          | Patchwork       | Stellar            |
| Chevron           | Gymnast          | Pawprint        | Stump*             |
| Chorni            | Half Moon        | Peace*          | Submarine*         |
| Chromosome        | Handstand        | Peajack         | Sunburst           |
| Churchill         | Hat Trick        | Photon 07 calf  | Sutures*           |
| Cirrus            | Hawksbill        | Pierce          | Teo                |
| Cirrus 10 calf    | Haze             | Pina            | Tether             |
| Clamp             | Haze 08 calf     | Pina 05 calf*   | Tether 08 calf     |
| Clamp 10 calf     | Highlighter      | Pinball         | Three Dots         |
| Clipper           | Horseshoe        | Pinpoint        | Tigris             |
| Cloud             | I Beam           | Pisces          | Treacle*           |
| Clutter           | Ibex             | Platform        | Triangle           |
| Collision         | Jai Alai         | Pongo           | Triton             |
| Colorado          | Jawa             | Prongs          | Umbra              |
| Cowlick           | Jurassic         | Puppet          | Umbra 10 calf      |
| Crook             | Kaolin*          | Pylon           | Vector             |
| Crystal           | Keyhole          | Quarternote     | Vector 10 calf     |
| Dapple            | Knuckles         | Quill           | Vee                |
| Ditto             | Knuckles 10 calf | Quixote         | Vibes              |
| Downsweep         | Lace             | Quixote 10 calf | W*                 |
| Drillbit          | Lace 10 calf     | Quote           | Wigwam             |
| Dyad*             | Lacuna           | Quote 10 calf   | Willow             |
| Eclipse           | Lagoon           | Raccoon         | Yurt               |
| Egreque           | Lascaux*         | Rooftop         | 0034               |
| EKG               | Littlespot       | Rope            | 0985               |
| Evolution         | Luna             | Sabot           | 8324               |
| Fez               | Maelstrom        | Salvo           |                    |

*Denotes first sighting by Brier Island Whale and Seabird Cruises Research Division - \**

### Highlights of 2010

The first cruise of the season was on our newly acquired Zodiac™ on May 15, 2010. The sightings were typical for early in the season with minke whales being the finding for that day. This species continued to be seen as well as fin whales. Finbacks are the second largest whale in the world and the largest that we see here in the Bay of Fundy. They can reach lengths of up to 25 metres!

The first humpback whales were sighted on June 7, 2010.

This enticed our research crew to board the Mega Nova and head out to the Bay to where the Cetacean Adventure had found the whales in order to obtain the required identifying photographs. The whales were identified as **Cloud**, **Gremlin** and **Luna**, three whales that are well known to the Bay of Fundy. Cloud has the distinction of being the

oldest whale of known age. He was born in 1977 to Istar, which makes him 33 years old. We don't know the longevity of humpback whales but it is assumed that it is between 50 to 60 years.

From experience, we know that the humpback whales can be found early in the season at an area called the Prong which is about 15 miles northwest of Brier Island. A number of our whale watch cruises found us travelling to that area so that our passengers were satisfied and we as researchers were as well. We were able to collect important data and photographs of individual humpback whales that may not have been sighted and documented otherwise. Some of the whales that were known were: **Grand Manan, Jawa, Sockeye, Clutter, Blanco, Baton, Pierce and Chromosome**. It was on one of these whale watches that we recorded the first mother and calf pair for the season. The mother was later identified as **Stalagmite** by our colleagues at the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies. Incidentally, we were the only research organization that sighted this mother and calf pair in 2010, which is why our research is very important to the humpback research that takes place in the Gulf of Maine.



On June 16, we hosted 5 students from Westport Village School. They chose to go out on the Zodiac for their whale watch. Unfortunately, we weren't able to take them out into the Bay of Fundy as it was windy and the seas were rough. They did enjoy the ride though and did see some seals at Gull Rock.

By the end of June we were seeing the whales move closer to Brier Island which was very welcome to us as we would not have to travel so far, making for some extended whale watch cruises.



Some of the other whales that were sighted in June were: **Quixote** and her calf, **Haze 08 calf, Pongo, Little spot, Tether 08 calf, Clipper, Patchwork, Lagoon, Chorni, New Moon and Squiggle**.

The month of July brought some typical Bay of Fundy weather, fog. Although this past summer the fog was not as long lasting as last season when the grey stuff lingered for 39 consecutive days. Fog is not really an issue when it comes to locating whales but it does tend to take a bit longer. Instead of finding them by sight, we rely on our ears, shutting down the boat's engine and listening for the sound of whale's blow. Experienced ears can judge the distance and direction from where the sound emanated and point the boat toward it.

Some of our best cruises have been in fog conditions. As the light diminishes, plankton rises to the surface and being at the bottom of the food chain, larger plankton and fish follow its prey to the surface.

Because of this, we witnessed numerous occasions of surface feeding, something that we haven't seen in a long time due to the absence of prey species. The Bay of Fundy is a summer feeding area for many species of cetaceans. It is vital that they accumulate a blubber layer for the winter as some species such as the humpback whales fast during

those months. They lose 10% of their body weight during the winter.



In July, we were pleased to see **Flash** return to the Bay of Fundy, and with a calf! The calves are about 6 months old when they arrive with their mothers, having been born in January in the warmer waters of the Caribbean Sea.

The whales stayed close for the remainder of the month. New whales identified in July were **Pinpoint, Puppet, Shark, Wigwam, Salvo, Paravane, Sabot, Collision, Rooftop** and many others.

The month of August started on an exceptional note when three humpback whales that are usually not sociable decided to astonish us by closely approaching the boat for about 45 minutes. The whales were identified as **Lagoon**, who usually avoids boats, **Baton** and # **0034**.



Each one vied to be the closest and # 0034 even tried to keep Lagoon away from the boat. It was an amazing sight which left everyone in awe of these great whales that inhabit the Bay of Fundy. The

next day we saw Lagoon unaccompanied and he had returned to his usual self, ignoring the boat!

On August 3, 2010, we welcomed an old friend back into the Bay, and she brought her fourth calf with her. Foggy is one of our favourite humpback whales as we have watched her grow into adulthood since 1987 when she herself was brought here as a calf by her mother Bermuda. The calf proved to be quite active, entertaining us by breaching next to the boat. There is nothing so exhilarating as to see a great whale leaping out of its domain. The wave as it lands is immense, even with a small whale!



New humpback whales continued to be sighted daily, including several calves. On several occasions, our cruises consisted of sighting only mother and calf pairs which was not a problem as the calves were very active, trying out behaviours that they had just discovered such as breaching and flipper slapping. On August 12, 2010, we sighted **Bungee, Flash, Knuckles, Foggy, Lace** and their calves.

Humpback whales are known to be sociable, not only with their own kind but with us as well. One individual which is sure to please a crowd is Peajack, an adult female. On one occasion she was joined by Pierce another adult female. Together, they approached the Mega Nova to have a better look at the occupants within. Sometimes these "muggings" only last a matter of minutes and at other times they can last for up to two hours. Peajack and Pierce stayed with us that day for 45 minutes and it brought to our minds, just who is watching whom? On a side note, we enjoyed Peajack so much this past summer that we decided

to add her to the adopt a whale list. We have been seeing her here in the Bay of Fundy since 1995 when she arrived to the Long Island shoreline with Mr. Burns.



Another whale that we enjoyed watching and who seems to enjoy watching us, is Sockeye, an adult male with an under bite, the characteristic that earned him his name. During one of his visits, he swam closely by the boat and would pause to flipper slap, trying to get our passengers wet, and to their delight he was often successful!



At the end of the month we noticed that the number of humpback whales had started to

decline. However, we were seeing a variety of other species in the area, such as minke whales and North Atlantic Right whales. At the end of August we sighted the first of the larger toothed whales documented, Pilot Whales.

Another surprise came our way on August 28. We had been hearing reports of Sperm whales in the Bay of Fundy but we never dreamed that we would actually get to see one!



As we approached the whale, the first indication that it may be this species was the telltale blow that is directed to the left due to the positioning of their blowhole. The whale stayed at the surface for quite some time to recover from its long dive. Sperm whales are capable of staying submerged for up to 90 minutes. Fortunately, this whale was only taking 30 minute dives which were long enough! We tried to stay with the whale for several surfacings in order to obtain photographs of the whale. Sperm whales are individually identified by notches and scars found on the trailing edge of their flukes. These photographs were then submitted to Dr. Hal Whitehead at Dalhousie University who maintains a catalogue of sightings in the North Atlantic.

Humpback whales identified in August were: **Eclipse, NAHWC 0985, Lacuna, Vector** and calf, **Wigwam, Patchwork, Fist, Cacophony, Southpaw** and many others!

The first of September brought us Hurricane Earl which kept us ashore for two days. The storm brought into the area yet another big surprise for

us, a Magnificent Frigate bird, which is usually sighted in tropical waters. Strong hurricane force winds blew this bird off course and into the Bay of Fundy as well as a number of Laughing Gulls which were sighted province wide.



September also brought another visitor into the Bay of Fundy, an adult male Orca! This species of cetacean is more common off the coast of Newfoundland and are usually in pods. Orcas are very social animals and travel in family groups, although research has shown that adult males will leave their family groups when they get older. We compared photographs of this whale with those that were taken of an orca sighted here in 2008 and it was discovered that it was the same individual! This finding was confirmed by researchers from Newfoundland and Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies.

At the time of this sighting, the Orca was chasing a group of dolphins. These whales are well known for feeding on other cetaceans.




This individual was sighted a few days later and was following a fish dragger. Whales have been

known to do this, waiting for a handout of excess fish or waste products from cleaning the fish.

The humpback whales were still being sighted in September though not as abundant as in August. We were still documenting new individuals such as **Vibes** and **Slumber**.

On September 24, 2010, we conducted a short research cruise due to the Captain spotting whales from shore on Brier Island. Because we do not want to miss any individuals that may arrive in the Bay, it is vital to capture as much data as possible. The whales sighted on that day were **Buckle** (2007 calf of Flash), **Lacuna**, **Squiggle**, **Lacuna**, **Handstand**, **Scream**, **Prongs**, **Quill**, and **Pylon**. All of these whales were within a two mile radius of each other!

The remainder of the season was uneventful, the last cruise of the season being on October 11, 2010. That cruise was looking a bit doubtful because of the weather conditions. It was looking as if we would have to finish the rest of the cruise in St. Mary's Bay where the sea conditions were much better but we received a call from our other Captain who spotted a humpback whale from Brier Island. We turned and made our way to Northwest Ledge where we found Scream, an adult male renowned for approaching boats. As we made our way we passed over a swarm of Lion's Mane jellyfish, numbering in the thousands! We also watched a pod of Atlantic White Sided dolphins.

All in all, it was a spectacular season with 155 individual humpbacks being sighted with several unknowns yet to be identified. We also documented several North Atlantic Right Whales and Fin whales, all of which photographs will be contributed to their respective research organizations. Our only wish that 2011 will be just as successful and maybe even better! 



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## FISH FARMING EXPANSION FOR NOVA SCOTIA CAUSES CONCERN

*By Karen Crocker*

Controversy surrounds Nova Scotia's Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture's long range plan for development of industrial sized fin fish farms in St. Mary's Bay Nova Scotia. St. Mary's Bay has long been a traditional fishing ground for lobster fishers, and home to many species of marine mammals that summer here off the shores of Long and Brier Islands. Recently our Nova Scotia government as implemented a long range plan to significantly increase the presence of open net fin fish farms in Nova Scotia's coastal waters. This will undoubtedly come with a price. Current methods of fin fish farming in our oceans are plagued with controversy. Open net fin fish farming releases a multitude of wastes, contaminants and pesticides as well as antibiotics into our open oceans daily. There are no current strong regulations in Nova Scotia to monitor the effects of these pollutants on our marine environment. Currently our province relies on data that monitors only the areas in the cages themselves and the environments effect on the salmon contained in them. Recent studies by Environment Canada in October of 2010 showed that current treatments for sea lice, which plague the salmon in these cages, were lethal to lobster. Reports from fishermen in areas where salmon farms are prolific are that the environment has changed and not for the better. So many questions have been left unanswered by concerned citizens in regards to the environmental degradation caused by large scale open net fish farming. Local groups of concerned individuals are popping up all around coastal Nova Scotia, groups such as the St. Mary's Bay Coastal Alliance, Friends of Shelburne Harbour, Friends of Pt. Mouton to mention a few. Educated professional individuals who are seeing firsthand the negative impacts of open net fish farming on their marine ecosystems are speaking out publicly and demanding that before government proceed with any expansion of fin fish farming in our coastal waters the current regulations must become more stringent in regards to how wastes from these sites can be contained. We have no idea what long term effects farming of this magnitude will have on the food sources which are critical to sustain the marine environment that

now inhabits the Bay of Fundy and St. Mary's Bay. Nova Scotia is fortunate to have this pristine coastline and we do not want to end up in the same situation facing Chile, Norway and Scotland. We must protect these coastal waters for our traditional self-sustaining fisheries, our whales, our seabirds and our way of life.

## RIGHT WHALE NEWS 2010-2011



The North Atlantic Right whale continues to be the rarest large whale in the world with just under 400 individuals in its population. Even though the numbers have increased slightly, they are far from out of danger. During the winter of 2010, there were 19 calves born to that species, of which we documented three. The reports from New England Aquarium who conduct research in the Bay is that the numbers of Right Whales in the Bay of Fundy were few. They conducted 17 surveys, and documented only 35 individual right whales in the Bay of Fundy in 2010. This is far lower than the 168 individuals in 2009. Surveys were performed in other areas such as Roseway Basin off the south shore of Nova Scotia but the numbers of whales there were scattered. In that area, the team from New England Aquarium documented 30 individual right whales.

Researchers speculate that because of the presence of squid eating species of cetaceans such as pilot whales and sperm whales that there was a shift in the food resource. Water temperature was only slightly warmer than normal and it is possible that warmer water infiltrated into the Gulf of Maine. This tends to reduce the copepod plankton, which is food for right whales.

There were other scattered sightings of right whales throughout the season but the majority of the population was unaccounted for.

In the 2010 season, researchers at Brier Island Whale and Seabird Cruises recorded 5 sightings of right whales in the south eastern portion of the Bay of Fundy. This included two mother and calf pairs that came into Grand Passage. There was concern that they may get too close to the fish farm but they managed to avoid the obstacle and return to the Bay of Fundy, heading in a northerly direction toward Grand Manan Basin, their feeding area.



*Right Whale close to shore in Grand Passage*

**DEAD HUMPBACK AT WESTERN LIGHT ON BRIER ISLAND**



*Juvenile Humpback washed up on Brier Island*

On December 1, 2010, we were saddened to discover that a juvenile humpback whale had washed ashore at Western Light on Brier Island. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

There is scarring present on the pectoral flippers and around the caudal peduncle which indicates



*Unknown humpback as photographed by Danielle Dion Of Quoddy Link Marine*



*Fluke print of deceased humpback which matches the above*

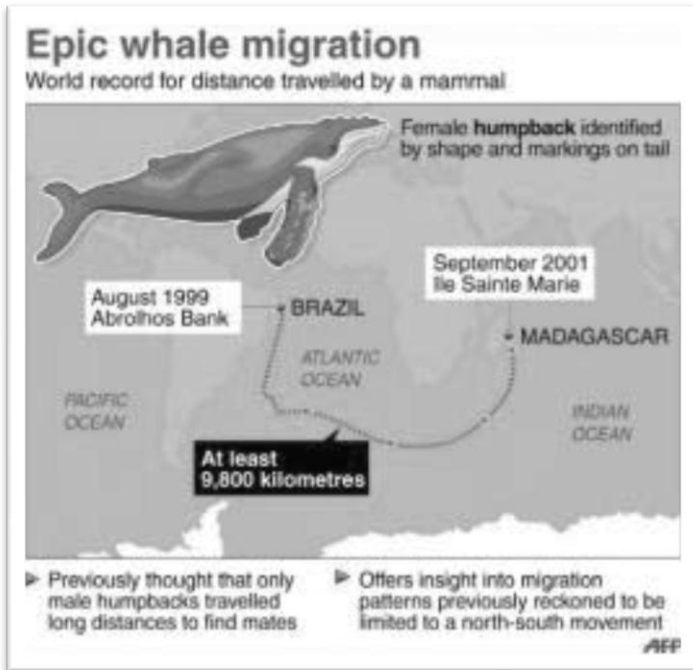
that this whale had been entangled at one time. The whale was matched to a carcass that had been floating near Grand Manan on November 28 and at that time, the rope was visible. Danielle Dion, a researcher with Quoddy Link Marine, had photographed this whale earlier in the season when it was still alive.



*photo by Grand Manan Research Station*

## HUMPBACK WHALE BEATS LONG DISTANCE RECORD

A humpback whale has broken the world record for travel by any mammal, swimming at least 9800 kilometres (6125 miles) from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean in search of a mate.



The female humpback was first photographed off Brazil's coast on August 7, 1999. It was later photographed more than two years later on September 21, 2001 by a whale watching operator off the coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The match was made thanks to a watchful eye on Flickr, a website designed to share photographs. "It is the longest documented movement by a mammal, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) longer than the longest seasonal migration that has been reported," according to the research headed by Peter Stevick of the College of the Atlantic, in Bar Harbor, Maine. Until now, it was thought that only males, rather than females, would be likely to wander such extreme distances in quest of a partner.

Humpbacks are known to be long-distance swimmers, but until now their migration patterns were thought to be between northern and southerly latitudes.

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