



Humpbacks & High-Rises

Whale Tails 2017/4

This is our quarterly newsletter bringing you a summary of the urban marine mammal world. Facts, Stories and Events. Join us on the largest mammal migration on earth!

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Breach! A close encounter with our majestic humpback whales is a memorable moment. Something for life. Something worth fighting for.

[Whale Season Summary](#)

by CEO Olaf Meynecke

At HHR we like to break our own records and we did it again. During 120 survey days between June and November, HHR volunteers covered over 250 survey hours surveying 623 individual whales. We also observed a minimum of 290 dolphins on 49 occasions, 4 Hammerhead shark, 2 unidentified sharks and 9 turtles. The surveys were done by 58 trained volunteers. While we had a little less whales surveyed this year compared to 2017 we had more survey days and more volunteers.

Some of this years highs and lows include the sighting of Migaloo during his northern and southern migration, dwarf Minke whales, Southern Right Whales, Killer Whales and False Killer Whales. But we also had the highest number of stranded humpback whales on record on the east coast of Australia. This is reflected by 5 newborn humpback whale calves that died within a few weeks on the Gold Coast and 6 whales that were entangled in shark nets and 5 stranded in the bay. The number of boats and breaches of regulations appeared to have increased in 2017 and a dredger that was in operation for 4 month during whale season also caused reason for concern for the well being of whales in the region.

Other HHR activities:

- HHR was at the following events and schools: Clean Up Australia Day Broadbeach (05/03/2017), World Oceans Day Beach Clean up Burleigh (09/06/2017), MBRS Open Day North Straddie (25/11/2017), Gold Coast

Green Week Stall (02/06/2017), MBRS Marine Mammal Symposium stall (31/07/2017), Presentation Cutting Edge Science Griffith Uni (29/11/2017), Presentation Sporties Warehouse (19/10/2017), Presentation Marymount Primary school (August)

- Intern Jamie Holmstrom from California contributed to HHR research helping Laura Torre with tourist surveys.
- A GC resting study for south-east Queensland was initiated by Rebecca Valani from Denmark as part of her Masters and supported by HHR to be published in 2018
- HHR supported research outcomes were presented at SMM in Halifax, AOGS in Singapore, ECCA in Glasgow, ACES in Brisbane
- New partners include Hover and Sunshine Coast Afloat
- Over 25 media stories in print, TV and radio

Without the dedicated support of our volunteers this season and their hundreds of hours of surveys we would not be able to achieve the protection of marine mammals. We are the largest and only marine mammal monitoring program in south-east Queensland. Be part of the change and help us. Volunteer or donate. Join us for the 2018 whale season.

Please support our work. We have no funding or government support and rely on you. We need people who care about our marine life in south-east Queensland waters.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May the whales be plenty and our dolphins joyful.

Olaf Meynecke
CEO HHR



Our Earthwatch survey team at North Stradbroke Island making a fluke.

[BBQ, AGM and end of year celebration](#)

by Olaf Meynecke

We have the best time when we are together. Just like our humpback whales we do enjoy aggregating and socialising from time to time. In October we organised a wonderful meat and plastic free BBQ for the end of whale season celebration initiated by our HHR Secretary Courtney. It was a great way to farewell our whales. Sitting by the sea, watching whale movies, eating good food and talking to friends and whale supporters.

Our AGM was held at Burleigh Heads Surfclub on the 14th December followed by our end of year celebration and awards ceremony. During the AGM we discussed the future of HHR and outstanding tasks that needed to be followed up. This is also a reminder to our community to come and help us when ever you can. We have a lot of data to be managed, social media and events to be organised. Are you good in design or have a passion for education? Come and talk to us on how to get involved. Our Secretary, President, Social Media Campaigner and CEO/Head Scientist will continue in their roles into 2018. We welcome Teleri as our Campaigner and Events Manager and Nicole as our new Treasurer. We like to thank Lauren and Alli for their support over the years.

During our end of year celebration we had amazing prizes to give away. Thanks to generous donations from various organisations and supporters (see our [event page](#) for details) we had a fantastic night. This years award for the 2018 HHR Surveyor went Brendan for his outstanding dedication to endless whale surveys, the 2018 HHR Campaigner award was given to Teleri for taken initiative to run the dredger

surveys and a number of stalls and the HHR Research award went to Nicole for working on citizen based fluke matching. Congratulations to our winners.

I am always inspired and encouraged to continue working for the whales and dolphins when being surrounded by passionate and like minded people. I am looking forward to work with those who stay with HHR into 2018 and meet many new volunteers to help us continue our course - for a safer and better whale and dolphin home in our region.



A whale season story

by Brendan Lumley

I have been fortunate enough to complete my 2nd consecutive migration season with HHR this year and to say it has been a blast would be an understatement to say the least! Towards the end of the 2017 whale season I got to witness some fantastic sights and subsequent surface behaviours from our large migrating friends, from both the surveys conducted aboard Tallships, Whales In Paradise and Spirit Of The Gold Coast as well as those conducted on Burleigh Headland.

My fondest memory this year took place whilst conducting one of the South Burleigh surveys with fellow volunteer Jamie Holmstrom. During the survey I spotted a large individual Humpback in the distance 'Pec Slapping'. Upon closer inspection with our Theodolite I confirmed that she was slapping almost rhythmically and was accompanied by her calf of whom was also slapping the surface of the water. It would start with mum bringing the entirety of her pectoral fin down on the water and just after the wake had dissipated the tiniest little tail slap was executed by the calf.

In what only seemed like a "I want to make a big splash like mum" moment it so beautiful to watch this mother and calf bond over such a graceful and effort-intensive surface behaviour respectively. Regardless of how determined and driven the calf was to "be like mum," I feel the only way I can accurately describe how it looked is by getting you, the reader to imagine the massive *THWACK* of an adult pec slap simply followed by a delayed miniscule *plop* similar to a rain drop hitting the water in comparison.

In any case, it was hands down my most favoured highlight from this year due to its sheer simplicity and beauty. Here's to yet another great season!



Join our [HHR expeditions](#) in 2018 and learn all about our marine life in the bay.

[HHR research goes global](#)

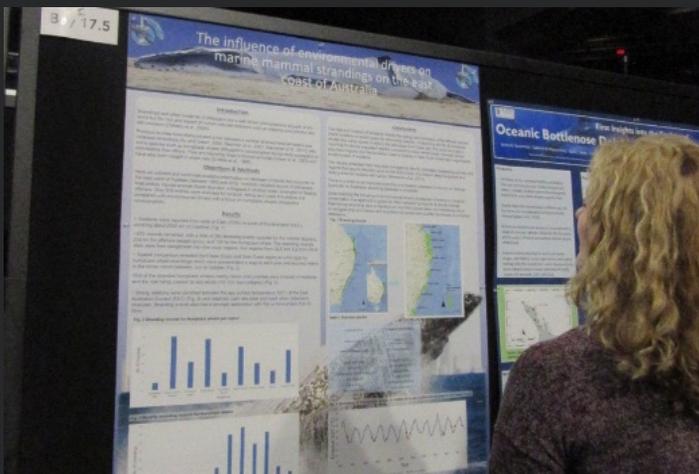
by Laura Torre

HHR researchers participated in the Society for Marine Mammalogy's 22nd Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in October. Laura Torre – Williams presented a talk entitled "**Newborn humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) calf observations outside of known calving grounds in the Gold Coast Bay, Queensland, Australia**" which resulted from a collaboration between HHR, Griffith University, Massey University and SeaPix Photographics, Ltd. The presentation reported the results of a study conducted on commercial whale watching vessels acting as research platforms of opportunity from 2013 to 2016. During this study period, 75 newborn calves were opportunistically sighted in Gold Coast Bay with the large majority (86.5%) sighted in the months of July and August. Additionally, these newborn calves were observed on the northern migration with their mothers.

The significance of these results are that humpback whale calves are being born in the Gold Coast bay or further south. Historically Gold Coast Bay has been regarded as part of the migration pathway of the population of East Australian humpback whale. The main calving grounds of our humpback whales are believed to be widely dispersed in the Great Barrier Reef region. The presence of newborn calves at this location shows that Gold Coast Bay is an emerging calving area for some portion of

this recovering population. It should be noted that calving habitat to the south of GBR is not well documented and not protected as such. As our climate continues to shift, warming subtropical waters may become preferred calving habitat for pregnant females.

HHR Scientist and CEO Dr Olaf Meynecke had a poster at the conference entitled **“The influence of environmental drivers on marine mammal strandings on the east coast of Australia”**. In this study stranding data was collated on humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) incidents in Queensland from 1989 to 2014. Incidents included reports of carcasses, vessel strikes, injured animals found stranded, entrapped in shallow water, entangled or floating offshore. The majority of incidents involving calves or juvenile humpback whales occurred during the austral winter (peak in August). The rate of strandings was associated with the position of the East Australian Current, and lagged Southern Oscillation Index (SOI). This study demonstrated the importance of long-term strandings records to allow for the investigation of trends over spatial and temporal scales relevant to migratory species. A comprehensive strandings program is an important conservation and monitoring tool to better understand long-term trends and to quantify key threats to cetaceans.



Moreton Bay Research Station Stall

by Michelle Coates

The UQ Moreton Bay Research Station on Stradbroke Island, traditionally known as Minjerribah by the local Quandamooka people, opened to the public on November the 25th this year to showcase 'one of Australia's largest marine research Centres'.

HHR, along with other marine research and preservation groups and local artists, ran stalls to greet very eager participants in the day's activities which ranged from informative presentations to rides in the Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre boat, Inspiration.

HHR volunteers were excited to be involved in a range of lead up activities for our stall including sewing whale motifs onto bags and purses designed by Teleri and brushing up on our humpback whale knowledge. This came in handy as many visiting children asked such challenging questions!

Laura, Ebony and myself had an early start to the day, sharing transport and fuelling up with morning coffees for the lovely ferry ride over to Minjerribah from Cleveland. All three of us agreed to take the vehicle ferry to maximise our time on the water, always hoping for more sightings of marine life.

Just to ensure we didn't miss out on any sea time possible, we took turns at running the HHR stall and pre-booked a ride on the Education Queensland discovery cruise. We sailed amongst yachts displaying pirate flags and sighted turtles cruising just under the surface nearby as we collected live samples to be displayed on the large screen from under the microscopes on board.

Everyone loved our HHR stall and it was great to meet so many excited whale enthusiasts, many only just realising we are one of the worlds greatest whale watching sites in the world. Some how we also juggled attending presentations on a number of much loved topics including sharks and whales.

I highly recommend becoming a HHR volunteer and adding this to your yearly calendar of activities that you can be involved in.



Upcoming Events & volunteer opportunities

You can help making a difference and be part of our growing group of whale and dolphin researchers.

- Clean up Australia Day is Sunday 4th March 2018. We will be having a clean up event in Broadbeach. Make sure to join and help make a difference.

- Be part of our dedicated volunteer team and sign up. Whale season starts again end of May 2018 with the first training seminar held in May. Send us an e-mail to science@hhr.org.au to register.
- Want to be part of the core team and get the real deal? Join our dedicated team that runs HHR at our monthly general meetings. Held at the end of each month. Next meeting end of January 2018.
- Sign our petition: You can stop whale entanglements by supporting our [Stop whale entanglement letter](#) and request alternative methods to be put in place and developed. Do you know a business on the Gold Coast that would like to endorse the open letter? Please, send us an [e-mail](#).

HHR relies on the interest, support and good will of people who feel that protecting marine mammals and learning about them is important. We are honest, independent and stand for the well being of our natural wonders and a sustainable whale watching industry. Our ongoing work entirely depends on donation. Please, consider [donating for whale research and protection](#).

HELP URBAN MARINE MAMMALS

You can support whale protection and research in south-east Queensland; a small donation goes a long way.

[DONATE NOW](#)

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