



Whales attract worldwide attention

Whales and
Whaling

Baitfish draw humpbacks, which in turn draw crowds

12-25-11

EDITOR'S NOTE: *During the final two weeks of 2011, the Sentinel is taking a look back at the most newsworthy stories and newsmakers of the year. The series will be published in ascending order, ending on Jan. 1 with the story selected by the Sentinel staff as the year's biggest.*

By **KIMBERLY WHITE**

kwhite@santacruzsentinel.com

2011 NEWSMAKERS

HUMPBACK WHALES

SANTA CRUZ — Local tourism officials will be hard pressed to duplicate the publicity generated by dozens of 45-ton visitors that lingered near Santa Cruz this fall, pausing

for a two-week feeding frenzy as they made their way to Mexico.

SEE **WHALES** ON **A5**

Local photographer Paul Schraub captured this now famous photo of whales 'spy hopping' in the Monterey Bay on Oct. 25.

PAUL SCHRAUB/SANTA CRUZ COUNTY CONFERENCE AND VISITORS COUNCIL

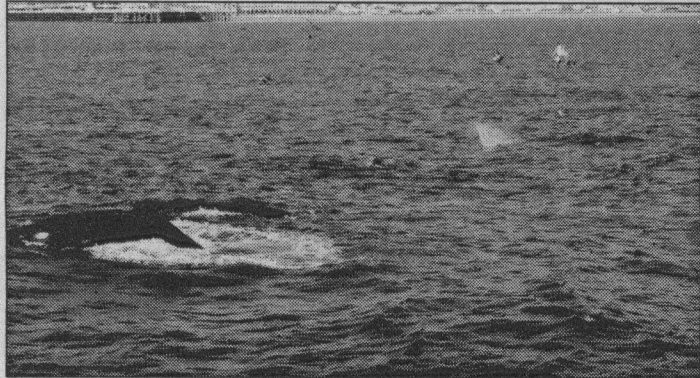


SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Although the skipper kept his vessel a responsible distance away from much of the whale activity in the Monterey Bay, the passengers of the Velocity got some up close and personal viewing of the whales in October.

A pair of humpback whales surface near whale watchers off of Seabright State Beach in October.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

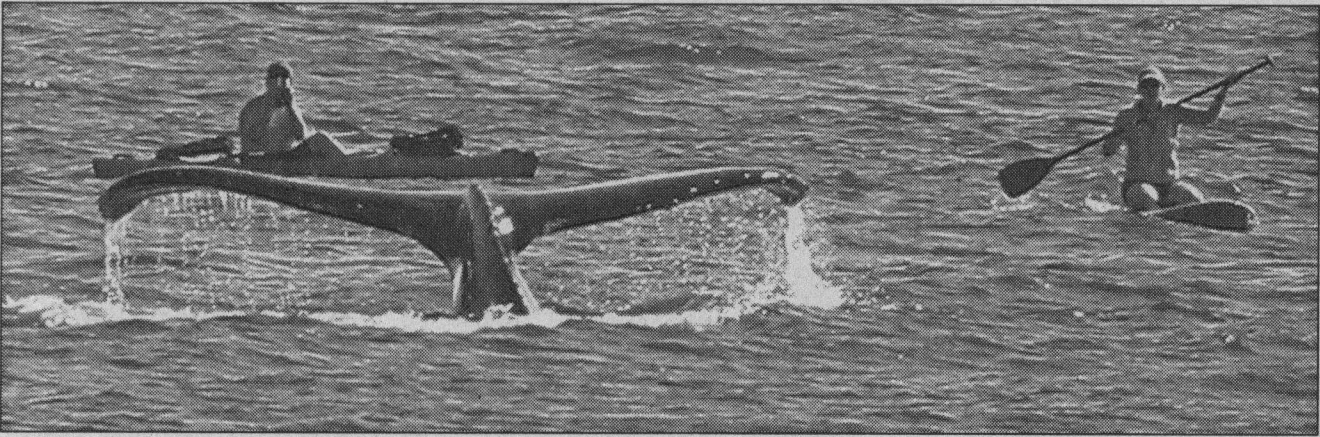
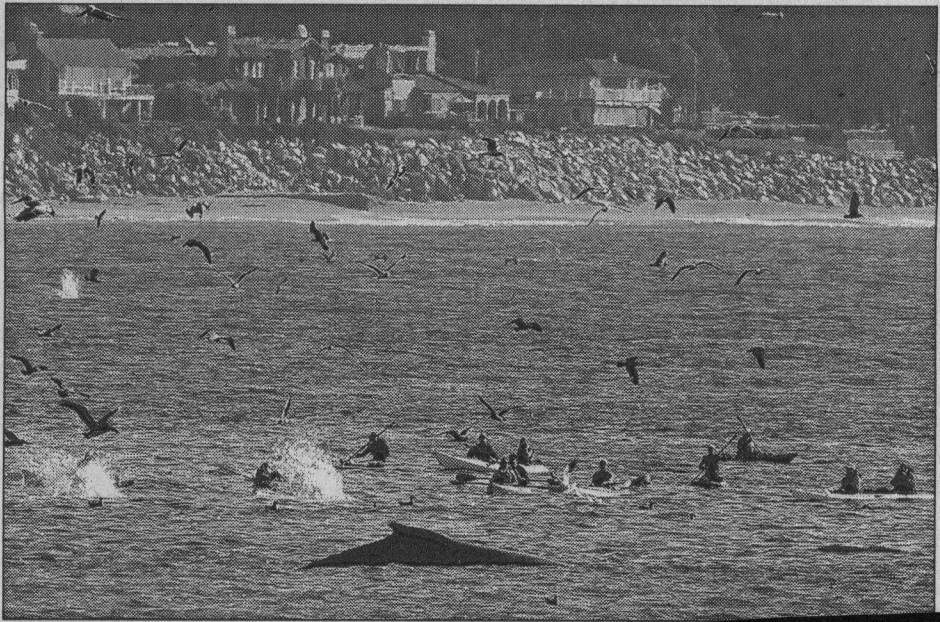


KEN STAGNARO/CONTRIBUTED

ABOVE: Stinky ventured back to Santa Cruz in October and she brought all her friends, according to Ken Stagnaro, captain of the Velocity of Santa Cruz Whale Watching & Scenic Cruises.

RIGHT: A crowd of kayakers gathers off of the Eastside as a whale surfaces in October.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL G

Two kayakers get an up close and possibly risky encounter with the slap of a humpback's tail in the Monterey Bay.

WHALES

Continued from A1

Drawn by the large number of anchovies, sardines and other baitfish, large numbers of humpback whales cruised around the Monterey Bay in mid- to late-October, leaving spectators breathless as they lunged to the surface, searing the waters just feet from delighted kayakers, boats and paddleboarders.

Among the first sightings was Oct. 21, when a group of children from Gault Elementary School were cruising through the harbor channel on a morning outing aboard the O'Neill Sea Odyssey catamaran. Surrounded by pods of dolphins and whales, they watched as two behemoths of the sea suddenly breached the surface, rolling directly next to the catamaran.

Several days later, local photographer Paul Schraub was on a boat just off Seabright State Beach on an assignment for the Santa Cruz County Convention and Visitors Council. He was snapping photos of models posing as business people, enjoying themselves during an ocean outing, when he snapped the now-famous photo of two whales surfacing just feet away from a kayaker.

The whales initially appeared to be "spy hopping," or popping up vertically to have a look around after spotting something interesting at the surface. But Schraub said marine biologists later determined they were "lunge feeding," or scooping up krill and other baitfish on their way to the surface.

"I've lived in Santa Cruz for 41 years and I've never seen anything more than a little bit of spray coming up from a whale as I was standing on shore," he said. "It's definitely a stand-out photo, but it's just not what I'm known for or what I've made a career out of."

Then on Oct. 28, a humpback emerged without warning beneath a small sailboat from the UC Santa Cruz boating center, lifting it several feet in the air before dropping it back down. That was followed by the widely viewed amateur video showing a bikini-clad surfer paddling over to two kayakers when two huge humpbacks suddenly exploded up from the depths.

Humpback whales are protected by the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, and the central California population's migration includes traveling down to Mexico to calve and breed. The Monterey Bay is one of the best places to observe them because of the submarine canyon's close proximity to shore, according to Monterey Bay Whale Watch.