

Firebrand conservationist rejects notion that he might be radical

By KATHARINE BALL
STAFF WRITER

Paul Watson bristles at the suggestion that he is radical.

"I'm a conservative," said the founder of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which, in its vigilante patrols of the seven seas, has sunk several whaling vessels, destroyed a whale-processing plant in Iceland, and painted hundreds of baby harp seals to make their pelts worthless to hunters.

"All conservationists are conservatives," Watson said. "Ronald Reagan is a radical. He's out there destroying the earth."

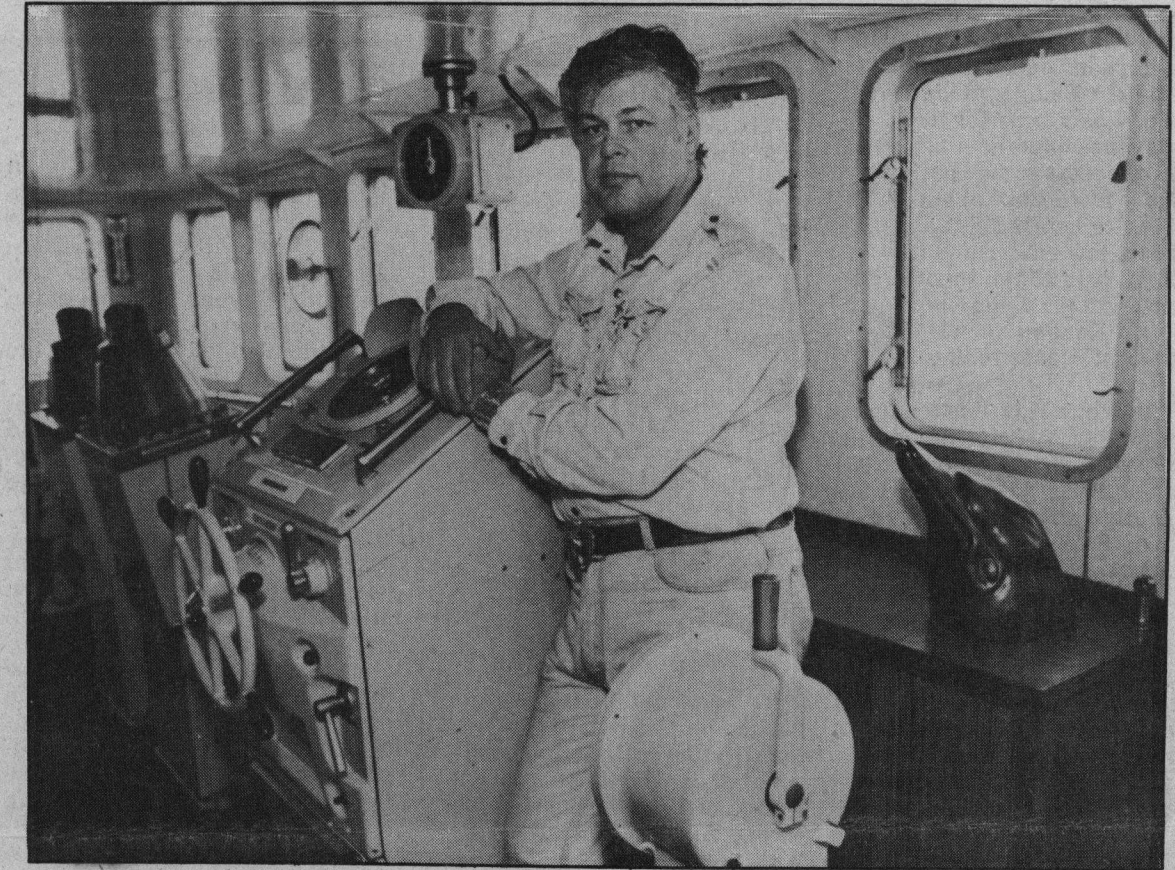
Watson defends his group's tactics by saying that they are actually upholding international law, which has prohibited whaling since Jan. 1 of last year. He also claims with pride that the attacks on property have resulted in no human casualties.

Watson, between trips to his native Canada to raise funds and give speeches about his marine wildlife preservation activities, has been staying in Santa Cruz for the past four weeks aboard the Sea Shepherd's 150-foot trawler, "Divine Wind," anchored off the Santa Cruz wharf.

The ship has her name inscribed on her prow in two languages, English and Japanese. The Japanese translation, "kamikaze," provides a stronger suggestion of the spirit of those piloting the ship.

Watson, a founding member of Greenpeace, split from that organization in 1977 after being reprimanded for grabbing a harp seal hunter by the wrist and throwing his club into the sea.

"The trouble with Greenpeace — well, I just thought they were wimpy," said Watson, who founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society immediately after leaving Greenpeace.



Chip Scheuer

Conservationist Paul Watson on the bridge the trawler, 'Divine Wind'.

A former merchant marine and Canadian Coast Guard officer, Watson, 37 years old next week, is diffident about the forces that imbued him with his militant conservatism.

He grew up in a small fishing village, St. Andrews by the Sea, in New Brunswick, Canada, one of seven children. His father was a chef.

Watson said he early developed a sympathy for the non-human creatures of the earth, and by age 8 was sabotaging duck hunts and interfering with the traps of fur hunters.

"Between 1980 and 2000, the earth is going to lose more species than it has lost in 2 billion years," said Watson. "The human species has no

vision. Human beings are unable to look beyond five years. We are destroying the genetic diversity of the

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earth."

The "Divine Wind" will remain in Santa Cruz for an indefinite period, before setting out for Los Angeles to continue fund-raising and public relations efforts. Then the 27-member crew will sail to Hawaii to outfit the ship

for a summer of interfering with drift-net fishing in the Pacific.

"We are trying to draw attention to the use of drift nets in California waters," Watson said. Plastic drift nets, he explained, range in size from one mile long to 30 miles long and are used to catch salmon, squid, sea trout and billfish. They also trap marine birds, porpoises and seals, which drown, he said. He said Japan and Korea use the most drift nets in their summer fishing in the north Pacific.

Sea Shepherd members will draw in any nets they find, bundle them up, and weight them so they sink to the bottom of the ocean, Watson said.