



TEDDY DALIGGA/CONTRIBUTED

The annual winter southern migration of the California gray whale seems to be peaking this week, according to Ken Stagnaro of Santa Cruz Whale Watching. This young gray was spotted just a mile off of Main Beach.

Now it's gray whales' turn

Whales and Whaling

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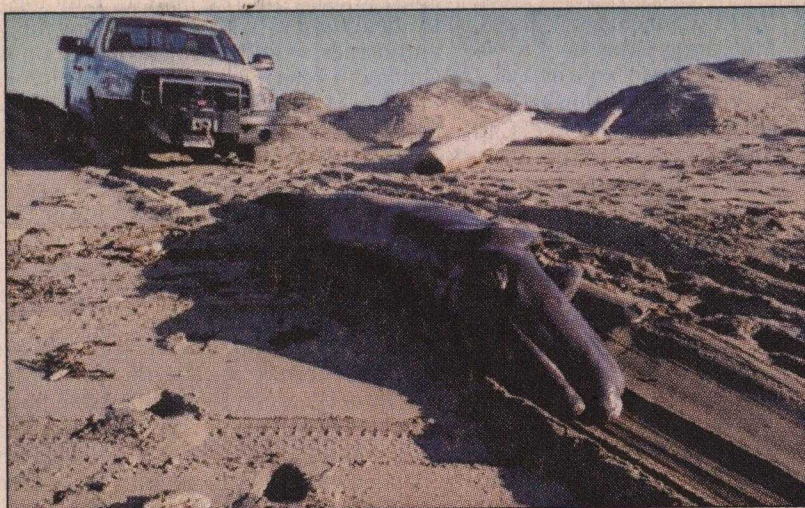
After humpback extravaganza, California's winter migration peaking

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SANTA CRUZ — Humpback whales delighted local residents when they turned Monterey Bay into a rush-hour traffic jam in late October and early November, a phenomenon that drew international attention.

On a smaller scale, the same thing is now happening with another behemoth of the deep. California gray whales are now being spotted in abundance, sometimes close to shore. Local tour operators say the whales' annual migration appears to be at its peak.

"Today was just phenomenal," said Mike Sack, a boat captain and part-



AZENITH SMITH/KION-TV

A newborn whale that washed ashore at Salinas River State Beach south of Moss Landing on Monday was later euthanized.

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owner of Sanctuary Cruises in Monterey. "Every hour we see probably 20 to 30 go by."

With a population estimated at 20,000 and above, California gray whales migrate 12,000 miles every winter from Alaska to Baja California. And while the whales are typically thought to wait for warmer waters before giving birth, local pods have clearly included young whales.

One washed ashore at Moss Landing Monday, and Sack said he has seen newborn gray whales off Monterey.

"We believe that today we saw a mother and calf pair, and it looked to be a calf that was only a few days old," Sack said.

Gary Griggs, director of Long Marine Laboratory at UC Santa Cruz, said boaters in Monterey Bay often have seen mother gray whales and calves in migration but it's uncommon at this time of year.

The newborn gray whale found at Salinas River State Beach was euthanized by a UC

Santa Cruz veterinarian Monday afternoon.

The whale, which appeared less than a week old, was spotted alive on the beach by beachgoers who called authorities, said Dr. Frances Gulland, a veterinarian at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito.

The whale, which was about 12 feet long and more than 1,700 pounds, apparently had been separated from its mother during strong winds on Sunday or Monday, Gulland said.

"It was getting dried out" and in "a very poor state" when veterinarian David Casper of UC Santa Cruz and other authorities arrived, Gulland said.

The whale was dragged above the high tide line with a truck winch. Authorities decided it could not be saved and Casper euthanized it with an injection, Gulland said.

Gulland said gray whales typically migrate to sheltered lagoons in Mexico to give birth. When they give birth before reaching shelter, a mother and her calf are more likely to be separated — especially during storms, Gulland said.

Kate Cummings, a natural-

ist with Blue Ocean Whale Watch in Moss Landing, said they saw a gray whale mother and calf about 3 miles off Moss Landing about 10:40 Monday morning.

It's not known if the calf was the same one that washed ashore, but Cummings said both whales "seemed fine." They surfaced often and were slowly making their way toward the beach during the 20 minutes they watched the pair, she said.

Gulland said gray whales have washed on shore in the past because they were born prematurely and were too far from the shelter they need.

The whale calf was expected to be taken to the Long Marine Laboratory in Santa Cruz on Monday night or Tuesday for a necropsy. The whale did not appear to have been attacked, Gulland said.

Meanwhile Ken Stagnaro of Santa Cruz Whale Watching said it appears the gray whale migration is at its peak. On his blog, he noted whales have been seen near the cliffs in Santa Cruz, and that on Sunday one breached more than 20 times near his boat, the Velocity.

Sack said he also saw

whales mating, coincidentally near Lovers Point in Pacific Grove. He said the whales tend to surface near Point Pinos, lingering there after a trip across the deep waters of the Monterey Bay.

Gray whales typically grow to about 40 feet long, and tend to be more subdued than their humpback counterparts. But one of Stagnaro's passengers did photograph one breaching spectacularly.

Whale-watching helps make Monterey Bay a year-round tourist draw. A YouTube video from November that shows two humpbacks surfacing in front of a bikini-clad surfer off the Santa Cruz coast has generated more than 7 million views to date.

Maggie Ivy, chief executive officer of the Santa Cruz Conference and Visitors Council, said her group tracked the media attention generated by the humpbacks' visit and estimated it to be worth \$4 million in free advertising. Several national and international news programs did stories on it.

"Wildlife-watching, and specifically whale-watching, is one of our key off-season draws," Ivy said.