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Abstract

Following the IWC Resolution 2001-3, 2004-1 and 2005-3, this paper reports status of conservation and research on the western gray whale. No mortality due to stranding/by-catch has been reported from the adjacent waters off Japan during the period from May 2012 to April 2013, and no sighting was made in neritic waters around Japanese coast. A study on skeletal morphology on 5 gray whales beached on the coast was made during the period concerned, which suggested possible expansion of the eastern stock to western region of the North Pacific.

Introduction

As in IWC Resolution 2001-3, which inter alia called on range states and others to actively pursue all practicable actions to eliminate anthropogenic mortality and minimize anthropogenic disturbance to the western gray whale (Eschrichtius robustus) population; IWC Resolution 2004-1, which inter alia called upon range states to develop or expand national monitoring and research programme on western gray whales; and IWC Resolution 2005-3 supporting further efforts to conserve this population, IWC has largely urged the conservation of western gray whales.


All known occurrences of the western gray whale around Japanese coasts since 1955 are summarized in Table 1.

Sightings

Systematic Sightings

Miyashita et al. (2013) compiled sighting information of all large cetaceans encountered during all of systematic whale sighting surveys by National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries. While a total of 4,381.6 n. miles for their searching distances, no gray whale was seen. Bando et al. (2013) reported sightings from the systematic manner (2,326n. miles by whale sampling survey; 8,748n. miles by dedicated sighting survey; 812 n. miles by whale prey species survey made at JARPN II – offshore component in 16 May to 3 October 2012, but no gray whale was found. Also, Yasunaga et al.
(2013) and Yoshida et al. (2013) reported no gray whale from sightings by JARPN II – coastal component at Sanriku and Kushiro (Hokkaido) in April to October 2012.

**POP sightings during small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries**

There was no additional report of gray whale sightings by POP bases from all of small-type whaling and dolphin fisheries operations in May 2012 to April 2013.

**Other POP sightings**

No other type sighting of gray whale has been made around Japanese coast.

**Mortality**

**Stranding**

No stranding of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

**Entanglement**

No entanglement of gray whale was reported during the period concerned.

**Research Activities**

As partly reported in the last year’s status report, Nakamura and Kato (in prep.) examined skeletal morphology on the five gray whale skeletons beached around Japanese coast in 1995 - 2005. It was found these beached five animals shared substantial similarities on the vertex region of the skull with those of eastern gray whales, while different from those of reported western animals by Andrews (1914). This may suggest possible expansion of the eastern stock to western region of the North Pacific. It is expected that further details on this study will be reported somewhere in due course.

Kanda and his colleagues started checking the status of tissue samples collected from the gray whales which have stranded or been entangled as well as stored at the ICR and others since 1996. It is expected to report the list to the IWC/SC meeting by a separate document.

**Administrative action**

As the continuation of its educational program, the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ) released the updated Manual for Coping with Stranding of Cetaceans on May 10, 2012. It was distributed to all coastal prefectures with an administrative circular drawing attention to the importance of appropriate treatment and protection of gray whale. The 142 page manual deals with various aspects, such as legal, administrative and technical, related to coping with entrapment/entanglement and by-catch as well as stranding of cetaceans. It reflects updated information of relevant laws and regulations, including the prohibition of catch, sale and possession of gray whales under the Fisheries Resources Protection Act.

As for the gray whale sighted off Irako (Aichi prefecture) on March 12, 2012, the FAJ issued an administrative circular to neighboring prefectural governments in order to draw attention of relevant
parties including local fishermen to the presence of the gray whale, request them to avoid entanglement, and remind them of regulation regarding the gray whale. With these efforts, neither by-catch nor stranding occurred. The sighting also drew attention from media.

Acknowledgements

We are largely indebted for many people of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries (Fisheries Research Agency), and Institute of Cetacean Research.

Table 1. All known and reported gray whale occurrences around Japan since 1955 to present (till April 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date dd/mm/yy</th>
<th>From which waters</th>
<th>Pacific side?</th>
<th>Juvenile?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/1955</td>
<td>Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E</td>
<td>Sea of Japan</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1 Entanglement</td>
<td>Nambu et al. (2003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/02/1968</td>
<td>Off estuary of Kumanawa River. Shingu, Wakayama 33.43N-136.02E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>9.0m female</td>
<td>1 Unknown*</td>
<td>Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/03/1982</td>
<td>Off Toba (Ise Bay), Mie 34.28N-136.53E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile**</td>
<td>1 Sighting</td>
<td>Furuta (1984)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/01/1990</td>
<td>Kohzu, Kanagawa 35.16N-139.13E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>8.0m male</td>
<td>1 Beached</td>
<td>Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/04/1993</td>
<td>Off Izu-Oshshima, Tokyo 34.30N-139.30E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>2*** Sighting</td>
<td>Mochizuki, Mori and Ishikawa (p.c.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/04/1995</td>
<td>Toyokoro, Obhiro, Hokkaido 42.35N-143.32E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>9.5m female</td>
<td>1 Beached</td>
<td>Sawamura and Kimura (p.c.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/05/1996</td>
<td>Suttu, Hokkaido 42.45N-140.10E</td>
<td>Sea of Japan</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>1 Entanglement</td>
<td>Fisheries Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/03/1997</td>
<td>Matunami, Kashiwazaki, Niigata 37.24N-138.34E</td>
<td>Sea of Japan</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1 Beached (skull only)</td>
<td>ICR (2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/07/1997</td>
<td>Off Kumanoura, Saga, Kochi 33.06N-133.09E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>2 Sighting</td>
<td>Kato and Tokuhori (1997)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2002</td>
<td>Miyazaki beach, Miyazaki 31.50N-131.27E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>Est. 7.7m</td>
<td>1 Beached</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/05/2003</td>
<td>Off Shizukuoka (Suruga Bay), Shizuoka 35.00N-138.46E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>9-10m</td>
<td>2 Sighting</td>
<td>Shizukuoka TV Asahi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/05/2005</td>
<td>Tomiymama (Tokyo Bay), Chiba 35.04N-139.49E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>7.81m</td>
<td>1 Entanglement</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2005)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15/07/2005</td>
<td>Enoshima, Onagawa Miyagi 38°23’N - 141°37’E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Cow (12.79m)</td>
<td>Calif (7.75m)</td>
<td>2 Entanglement</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/01/2007</td>
<td>Sanriku, Ofunato, Iwate 39°09’N - 141°54’E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9.19m</td>
<td>1 Entanglement</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2007)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>01/08/2007</td>
<td>Nishikioka, Tomakomai, Hokkaido</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12.33m</td>
<td>1 Beached</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/11/2009</td>
<td>Off Owase, Mie 33°52’N - 136°10’E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile, Ca. 6 – 7 m</td>
<td>1 Sighting</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/03/2012</td>
<td>Off Irako, Tawara, Aich 34°36’N - 137°01’E</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>1 Sighting</td>
<td>Kato et al. (2012), Ohike et al. (in prep)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970) reported as "Dead might be caused by the wound made by someone during the evening of the day".
**: Furuta (1984) estimated animal length to be 12m, but photographs of the animal clearly indicates much smaller length indicating juvenile.
***: There was an alternative that one additional animal was seen in adjacent waters.
References