

SC/69A/CMP/06

Sub-committees/working group name: CMP

**Status Report of Conservation and Research on the western North Pacific Gray Whales in
Japan, May 2022 - April 2023**

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Status Report of Conservation and Research on the western North Pacific Gray Whales in Japan, May 2022 - April 2023

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ABSTRACT

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted Resolutions 2001-3, 2004-1 and 2005-3 on the western North Pacific gray whale's conservation and research. On a voluntary basis, this paper presents Japan's information on conservation and research on the western North Pacific gray whale for the period from May 2022 to April 2023, which is relevant to those resolutions. Neither sightings nor anthropogenic mortality due to entanglement or other causes have been reported from the coast of Japan during the period investigated. The entire skeleton of the gray whale which was stranded at Wadoura, Minamiboso, Chiba prefecture in 2016 was excavated and will be stored at Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology.

KEYWORDS: GRAY WHALE; INCIDENTAL SIGHTINGS; STRANDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Several resolutions on research and conservation of the western North Pacific gray whale have been adopted by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). 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 North Pacific gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) population; IWC Resolution 2004-1, which *inter alia* called upon range states to develop or expand national monitoring and research program on the western North Pacific gray whale; and IWC Resolution 2005-3 supports further efforts to conserve this population. As response to those IWC Resolutions, Japan has provided to the IWC Scientific Committee (IWC SC) its annual scientific reports on the western North Pacific gray whale since 2005.

At the 68a meeting of the IWC SC in 2019, Japan expressed its intention to continue contributing with scientific information even after its withdrawal from the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) in June 2019, and consequently Japan voluntarily provided its progress report on the western North Pacific gray whale at the 68b meeting of the SC in 2020 to the 68d meeting of the SC in 2022.

The present report provides information on the western North Pacific gray whale in Japan for the period from May 2022 to April 2023. All the known records of the western North Pacific gray whale around the Japanese coasts since 1955 to date are given in Table 1.

SIGHTINGS

Systematic sightings

Katsumata *et al* (2023) reported that no gray whale was sighted in the western North Pacific, north of 35°N to 44°N, between 140°E and 154°E, during the systematic cetacean sighting survey conducted under the Japanese dedicated survey between August to September 2022.

Platform of Opportunity (POP) sightings

There was no additional report of the western North Pacific gray whale sighted by POP platforms during the commercial whaling and dolphin fisheries operations in May 2022 to April 2023. Also, no sightings from other POP platforms were reported.

MORTALITY

Stranding (including beached animals)

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

Entanglement

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

Administrative action

Considering the increase in the number of sightings of the western North Pacific gray whale in Japan's coastal waters, on 27 April 2016, the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ) re-issued a notification to all coastal prefectural governments. The purpose of the notification was to draw their attention to the increasing sightings of the western North Pacific gray whale, and to remind relevant coastal communities (including local fishermen) through prefectural governments on the relevant regulations concerning the conservation of the western North Pacific gray whale (release of live whales incidentally taken as well as the prohibition of possession and sale of their whale products). No sighting of the western North Pacific gray whale was reported from the prefectures during the report period.

Progress of scientific research

In the end of January 2023, the skeleton of the gray whale was excavated by one of the authors (Nakamura) and members of the relevant organizations. This animal was a juvenile female of 8.9 m which was stranded at Wadoura, Mimamiboso, Chiba prefecture in March 2016 (Nakamura *et al.*, 2017). The skeleton had been underground for more than six years and some of the bones were brittle, but all parts have been excavated. At this time (March 2023) the specimen is being cleaned and enforced at a taxidermy company (Nishio Biological Models) in Kyoto. After the series of cleaning and other operations are completed, these bones will be stored in Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology with the permission of their owner, Kamogawa Sea World.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to relevant officials of the Fisheries Agency of Japan and scientists of the Fisheries Resources Institute and the Institute of Cetacean Research.

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Fig. 1 The gray whale stranded at Wadoura, Minamiboso, Chiba prefecture in March 2016 (above) and its skeletons excavated in January 2023 (below).

Table 1. Reported western North Pacific gray whales around Japan since 1955 to present (April 2020).

Date dd/mm/yyyy	Geographical locality	Ocean basin	Biological data	n	Source	
					Status	Reference
16/Mar./1955	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36°41'N – 137°12'E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
10/Jun./1959	Off Kii-Ohshima, Kushimoto, Wakayama 33°29'N – 135°55'E	Pacific	?	1	Sighting	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
02/Feb./1968	Off estuary of Kumano River. Shingu, Wakayama 36.02E33°43'N – 136°02'E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.0 m female	1	Unknown*1	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
??/Apr./1970	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
27/Mar./1982	Off Toba (Ise Bay), Mie 34°28'N – 136°53'E	Pacific	Juvenile*2	1	Sighting	Furuta (1984)
25/Apr./1985	Off Taiji, Wakayama 33°34'N – 136°01'E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting (through TV)	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
25/Jan./1990	Kohzu, Kanagawa 35°16'N – 139°13'E	Pacific	Juvenile 8.0 m male	1	Beached	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
Middle/Apr./1993	Off Izu-Ohshima, Tokyo 34°30'N – 139°30'E	Pacific	Juvenile	2*3	Sighting	Mochizuki, Mori and Ishikawa (p.c.)
07/Apr./1995	Toyokoro, Obihiro, Hokkaido 42°35'N – 143°32'E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.5 m female	1	Beached	Sawamura and Kimura (p.c.)
16/May/1996	Suttu, Hokkaido 42°45'N – 140°10'E	Sea of Japan	Adult	1	Entanglement	Fisheries Agency
02/Mar./1997	Matunami, Kashiwazaki, Niigata 37°24'N – 138°34'E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Beached (skull only)	ICR
22/Jul./1997	Off Kumanoura, Saga, Kumamoto 33°06'N – 133°09'E	Pacific	Juvenile	2	Sighting	Kato and Tokuhiro (1997)
19/Mar./2002	Miyazaki beach, Miyazaki 31°35'N – 131°27'E	Pacific	Juvenile Est. 7.7 m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2003)
06/May/2003	Off Shizuoka (Suruga Bay), Shizuoka 35°00'N – 138°46'E	Pacific	Juvenile, 9-10 m	2	Sighting	Shizuoka TV Asahi
11/May/2005	Tomiyama (Tokyo Bay), Chiba 35°04'N – 139°49'E	Pacific	Juvenile, 7.81 m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2005)
15/Jul./2005	Enoshima, Onagawa Miyagi 38°23'N – 141°37'E	Pacific	Cow (12.79 m) Calf (7.75 m)	2	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2006)
18/Jan./2007	Sanriku, Ofunato, Iwate 39°09'N – 141°54'E	Pacific	Female 9.19 m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2007)
01/Aug./2007	Nishikioka, Tomakomai, Hokkaido 42°36'N – 141°30'E	Pacific	Female 12.33 m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2008)
04/Nov./2009	Off Owase, Mie 33°52'N – 136°10'E	Pacific	Juvenile, Ca. 6 – 7 m	1	Sighting	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2010)
12/Mar./2012	Off Irako, Tawara, Aich 34°36'N – 137°01'E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2012)
06/Apr./2014	Off Teradomari, Niigata 37°38'N	Sea of Japan	Adult, juvenile *4	2	Sighting	The Asahi Newspaper and by direct sighting

	– 138°48'E					by S. Nishiwaki
17/Mar./2015	Off Kozushima Island 34°13'N – 139°09'E	Pacific	Sub-adult	1	Sighting	https://www.facebook.com/aquamatedivingclub
31/Mar./2015	Off Teradomari, Niigata 37°38'N – 138°48'E	Sea of Japan	Adult	1	Sighting	The Asahi Newspaper
19/Apr./2015	Off Miho, Shizuoka 35°00'N – 138°31'E	Pacific	Sub-adult	1	Re-sighting of Kozushima ind. In May 2015	Direct sighting by H. Ohizumi
12/Jan./2016	Off Nishi-Kawana, Tateyama, Chiba, 34°57.416'N- 139°45.103'E	Pacific	Unknown	1*5	Re-sighting of Kozushima ind. In May 2015	http://nop.chips.jp/frame/003.html
04/Mar./2016	Wadoura, Minamiboso, Chiba, 35°2.085'N- 140°1.05'E	Pacific	Juvenile, 8.9 m female	1	Beached	Nakamura <i>et al.</i> , (2017)
05/Apr./2016	Arai beach, Ito, Shizuoka, 34°58.06'N -139°07.40'E	Pacific	ca. 7 m	1	Beached	http://izu-np.co.jp/ito/news/20160406iz0000000018000c.html
22/Feb./2017	Off Yokosuka, Kanagawa, 35°19.55'N - 139°40.27'E	Pacific	Unknown	1	Sighting	https://www.facebook.com/masamichi.saita?pnref=story
18-23/Apr./2017	Off Futtsu, Chiba, 35°19.37'N- 139°45.87'E	Pacific	Unknown	1	Sighting	http://news.tbs.co.jp/newseye/tbs_newseye3031425.html
02/May/2017	Aogashima Island, Tokyo, 32°27.26'N- 139°46.535'E	Pacific	Unknown	1	Sighting	https://eternal0love.wordpress.com/2017/05/02 (Not available after January 2018)
10/Feb./2018	Aogashima, Tokyo, 32°28.2'N-139°45.4'E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting	Personal communication
08/Mar./2019	off Kaga, Ishikawa, 36°22.04'N- 136°20.49'E	Sea of Japan	Unknown	1	Sighting	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkJMnw1znZPM
15/Mar./2019	off Arawa, Fukui, 36°16.04'N- 136°11.42'E	Sea of Japan	Unknown	1*6	Sighting	https://www.chunichi.co.jp/article/fukui/20190316/CK2019031602000021.html
11/Apr./2019	Manazuru, Kanagawa, 35°8.55'N-139°9.61'E	Pacific	Juvenile, 8.77 m male	1	Beached	Nakamura <i>et al.</i> , (2019)
22/Apr./2019	Miyake Island, Tokyo, 34°4.122'N- 139°28.48'E	Pacific	Juvenile, ca. 9 m	1	Sighting	https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20190423/k10011893291000.html https://youtu.be/DlmsNKSCB_8
13/May-02/Jun./2019	off Kahoku, Ishikawa, 36°45.2'N-136°41.8'E	Sea of Japan	Unknown	1*6	Sighting	https://headlines.yahoo.co.jp/videonews/nnn?a=20190514-00000335-nnn-soci https://www.oricon.co.jp/article/810434/
20/Jul./2020*7	Beach of Noto lake, Abashiri, Hokkaido, 44°6.295'N- 144°9.389'E	Sea of Okhotsk	Unknown	1	Beached	Fisheries Agency Nakamura <i>et al.</i> (2021)

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- *1: Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970) reported as “Dead might be caused by the wound made by someone during the evening of the day”.
 - *2: Furuta (1984) estimated animal length to be 12m, but photographs of the animal clearly indicate much smaller length indicating juvenile.
 - *3: There was an alternative that one additional animal was seen in adjacent waters.
 - *4: There are some possibilities those were cow and calf pair, but they did not occur as one unit at the same time.
 - *5: From May 2015 to April 2016, two more sightings have been recorded. One of which was sighted at Akasawa, Ito City, Shizuoka prefecture (34°51.101'N-139°5.771'E) on January 12, 2016 and the another one was sighted at Miike port of Miyake Island, Tokyo. According to Nakamura *et al.* (2017), these animals were re-sighting of Kozushima individual in 2015.
 - *6: Re-sighting of Kaga animal in 2019.
 - *7: The date of skeletonized remain was found.