

## Status Report of Conservation and Researches on the Western North Pacific Gray Whales in Japan, May 2011 – April 2012

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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 2011 to April 2012, while one sporadic sighting was made in neritic waters off the Pacific coast of middle Japan. Some research activities and administrative action were carried out for gray whale conservation during the period.

### 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.

Under such circumstances, as response to those IWC Resolutions, Japan provided scientific information on the western gray whales in June 2005 to May 2006 by Kato *et al.* (2006), in June 2006 to May 2007 by Kato *et al.* (2007), from June 2007 to April 2008 by Kato *et al.* (2008) from May 2008 to April 2009 by Kato *et al.* (2009), from May 2009 to April 2010 by Kato *et al.* (2010) and from May 2010 to April 2011 by Kato *et al.* (2011). We hereby submit a similar report for this year's meeting on the information for the period from May 2011 to April 2012.

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

### Sightings

#### *Systematic Sightings*

Miyashita *et al.* (2012) 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 5067.0 n. miles for their searching distances, no gray whale was seen. Tamura *et al.* (2012) reported sightings from the systematic manner (5,156 n. miles by whale sampling survey; 4,060 n.

miles by dedicated sighting survey; 592 n. miles by whale prey species survey) made at JARPN II – offshore component in 5 May to 30 August 2011, but no gray whale was found. Also, Yasunaga *et al.* (2012) and Kishiro *et al.* (2012) reported no gray whale from sightings by JARPN II – coastal component at Kushiro (Hokkaido) in April to October 2011.

#### *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 2011 to April 2012.

#### *Other POP sightings*

One sighting of gray whale was made off Irako port, Tawara-city, Aichi prefecture, Pacific coast in the middle of Japan (ca 34.36N-137E) on 12th, March 2012. The animal was likely to be juvenile as attached in Fig. 1. Further details including higher resolution images enough for photo-matching will be reported somewhere most likely this autumn by Ohike *et al.* (in prep).



Fig.1 Photo images of gray whale appeared off Irako Peninsula, Aichi. Top, right side dorsal view; bottom left, typical blow of gray whale; bottom right, ventral view of tail flukes. All photos were taken by Minamichita Beachland aquarium.

## **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 reported in the last year status report, Kato mostly completed morphological analyses on the two gray whale skeletons (cow and calf pair) entangled off Onagawa Town in June 2005 and it will be reported somewhere in later half of 2012 though he still continues his work to finalize the analysis in comparison with other skeletal measurements and other features. Kanda and his colleagues started checking the status of tissues 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 circulars 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.

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Table 1. All known and reported gray whale occurrences around Japan since 1955 to present (till April 2011).

Date dd/mm/yy	From which waters	Pacific side ?	Juvenile?	n	Source	
					Status	Reference
16/03/1955	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
10/06/1959	Off Kii-Ohshima, Kushimoto, Wakayama 33.29N-135.55E	Pacific	?	1	Sighting	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
02/02/1968	Off estuary of Kumano River. Shingu, Wakayama 33.43N-136.02E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.0m female	1	Unknown*	Nishiwaki and Kasuya (1970)
??/04/1970	Toyama (Toyama Bay) 36.41N-137.12E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Entanglement	Nambu <i>et al.</i> (2003)
27/03/1982	Off Toba (Ise Bay), Mie 34.28N-136.53E	Pacific	Juvenile**	1	Sighting	Furuta (1984)
25/04/1985	Off Taiji, Wakayam 33.34N-136E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting (through TV)	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
25/01/1990	Kohzu, Kanagawa 35.16N-139.13E	Pacific	Juvenile 8.0m male	1	Beached	Kasamatsu and Ishikawa (1990)
Middle/04/ 1993	Off Izu-Ohshima, Tokyo 34.30N-139.30E	Pacific	Juvenile	2***	Sighting	Mochizuki, Mori and Ishikawa (p.c.)
07/04/1995	Toyokoro, Obihiro, Hokkaido 42.35N-143.32E	Pacific	Juvenile 9.5m female	1	Beached	Sawamura and Kimura (p.c.)
16/05/1996	Suttu, Hokkaido 42.45N-140.10E	Sea of Japan	Adult	1	Entanglement	Fisheries Agency
02/03/1997	Matunami, Kashiwazaki, Niigata 37.24N-138.34E	Sea of Japan	?	1	Beached (skull only)	ICR (2005)
22/07/1997	Off Kumanoura, Saga, Kochi 33.06N-133.09E	Pacific	Juvenile	2	Sighting	Kato and Tokuhiko (1997)
19/03/2002	Miyazaki beach, Miyazaki 31.50N-131.27E	Pacific	Juvenile Est. 7.7m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2003)
06/05/2003	Off Shizuoka (Suruga Bay), Shizuoka 35.00N-138.46E	Pacific	Juvenile, 9-10m	2	Sighting	Shizuoka TV Asahi
11/05/2005	Tomiyama (Tokyo Bay), Chiba 35.04N-139.49E	Pacific	Juvenile, 7.81m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2005)
15/07/2005	Enoshima, Onagawa Miyagi 38°23'N - 141°37'E	Pacific	Cow (12.79m) Calf (7.75m)	2	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2006)
18/01/2007	Sanriku, Ofunato, Iwate 39°09'N - 141°54'E	Pacific	Female 9.19m	1	Entanglement	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2007)
01/08/2007	Nishikioka, Tomakomai, Hokkaido	Pacific	Female 12.33m	1	Beached	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2008)
04/11/2009	Off Owas, Mie 33°52'N - 136°10'E	Pacific	Juvenile, Ca. 6 – 7 m	1	Sighting	Kato <i>et al.</i> (2010)
12/03/2012	Off Irako, Tawara, Aich 34°36'N - 137°01'E	Pacific	Juvenile	1	Sighting	Present report, Ohike <i>et al.</i> (in prep)

\*: 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.

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