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New data on Soviet blue whale catches in the eastern North Pacific in 1972

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ABSTRACT

Details are provided of 17 previously unreported catches of blue whales by the USSR in 1972. The catches were made between mid-July and mid-September in the eastern North Pacific at distances of from 96 to 626 nautical miles from the U.S. west coast. These previously unknown catches bring the total Soviet catch of North Pacific blue whales to 1,638.

Ivashchenko *et al.* (2013) reported corrected catch totals for Soviet whaling operations in the North Pacific. These included 1,621 blue whales, *Balaenoptera musculus*, of which only 858 were officially reported to the IWC. Here, we report details of an additional 17 previously unrecorded catches of this species, taken by Soviet whaling fleets in the eastern North Pacific in 1972. Data on the catches were discovered in the joint scientific report for the *Vladivostok* and *Dalniy Vostok* whaling fleets for the 1972 whaling season (Isakov *et al.* 1973).

The catches are listed in Table 1 below. Because the report gives joint figures for the *Vladivostok* and *Dalniy Vostok*, it is not possible to determine whether the catches were made by one or both fleets; noon position data might clarify this, but these are known to be not entirely accurate for Soviet fleets (Ivashchenko, unpublished). The report gives the catch data in a table only, with no further discussion or information in the main text.

These previously unknown catches bring the total Soviet catch of North Pacific blue whales to 1,638; revised figures by year and whaling operation are given in Table 2. Catch locations are shown in Figure 1; these were at distances from the coasts of Washington and Oregon ranging from 96 to 626 nautical miles. For convenience and context, Figure 2 shows the locations of all Soviet blue whale catches ($n = 236$ animals) for which position data are available.

It is not clear how the Soviet fleet was able to kill blue whales (which were completely protected at this time), since 1972 saw the introduction of the IWC's International Observer Scheme (IOS), which required foreign observers to be placed aboard factory ships. We do not know whether these illegal catches were made possible by the absence of an inspector on deck at the time the animals were processed, or whether the inspector was aware of them but failed to report the infractions. Whatever the reason, as has been noted by others (Mikhalev *et al.* 2009), it is clear that illegal catches continued at some level despite implementation of the IOS.

REFERENCES

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Table 1
Soviet catches of blue whales in the eastern North Pacific, 1972. Stomach contents are presumed to be krill in all cases, but this is not specified in the source material.

	Month	Day	Sex	Length m	Long	Lat	Stomach contents
1	July	17	F	19.6	135 57' W	44 14'	Small qty krill
2	July	17	M	21.8	135 57' W	44 14'	full
3	July	18	M	20.1	133 53' W	42 44'	full
4	July	27	M	21.5	128 56' W	43 40'	full
5	July	27	M	22	128 56' W	43 40'	full
6	August	1	M	21.3	127 52' W	45 16'	full
7	August	3	F	23	126 26' W	44 02'	full
8	August	22	F	18.5	134 47' W	47 29'	Small qty krill
9	August	22	M	21.6	134 47' W	47 29'	full
10	August	22	F	24	134 47' W	47 29'	full
11	August	22	M	20	134 47' W	47 29'	full
12	August	22	F	20.3	134 47' W	47 29'	full
13	August	23	M	17.4	131 59' W	46 17'	Small qty krill
14	September	2	F	20.7	135 21' W	45 43'	full
15	September	2	M	20.5	135 21' W	45 43'	full
16	September	2	M	20	135 21' W	45 43'	full
17	September	13	F	20	138 46' W	44 42'	full

Table 2

Soviet catches of blue whales in the North Pacific, 1948-78 (revised after Ivashchenko *et al.* 2013, Table 6). Numbers in parentheses are the officially reported catches. Another 29 blue whales were caught prior to 1948.

Year Station/FF	<i>Aleut</i>	<i>Kuril Islands</i>	<i>Sovetskaya Rossiya</i>	<i>Vladivostok</i>	<i>Dal'niy Vostok</i>	<i>Slava</i>	Total (reported)
1948	3						3 (3)
1949	3						3 (3)
1950	5	2					7 (7)
1951	7	9					16 (16)
1952	7	17					24 (24)
1953	11	10					21 (21)
1954	12	23					35 (35)
1955	4	27					31 (31)
1956	7	45					52 (52)
1957	9	44					53 (53)
1958		14					14 (14)
1959	22	19					41 (41)
1960		14					14 (14)
1961	2	15					17 (17)
1962	19	11	37				67 (30)
1963	14	1	108	299	88		510 (348)
1964	17		79	25	67		188 (77)
1965	10		43	163			216 (72)
1966				15	45		60 (0)
1967				51	43		94 (0)
1968				3	28	25	56 (0)
1969				2	15	33	73 (0)
1970				7	12		19 (0)
1971				4	3		7 (0)
1972					17		17 (0)
Total	152	251	267	592	301	58	1,638 (878)

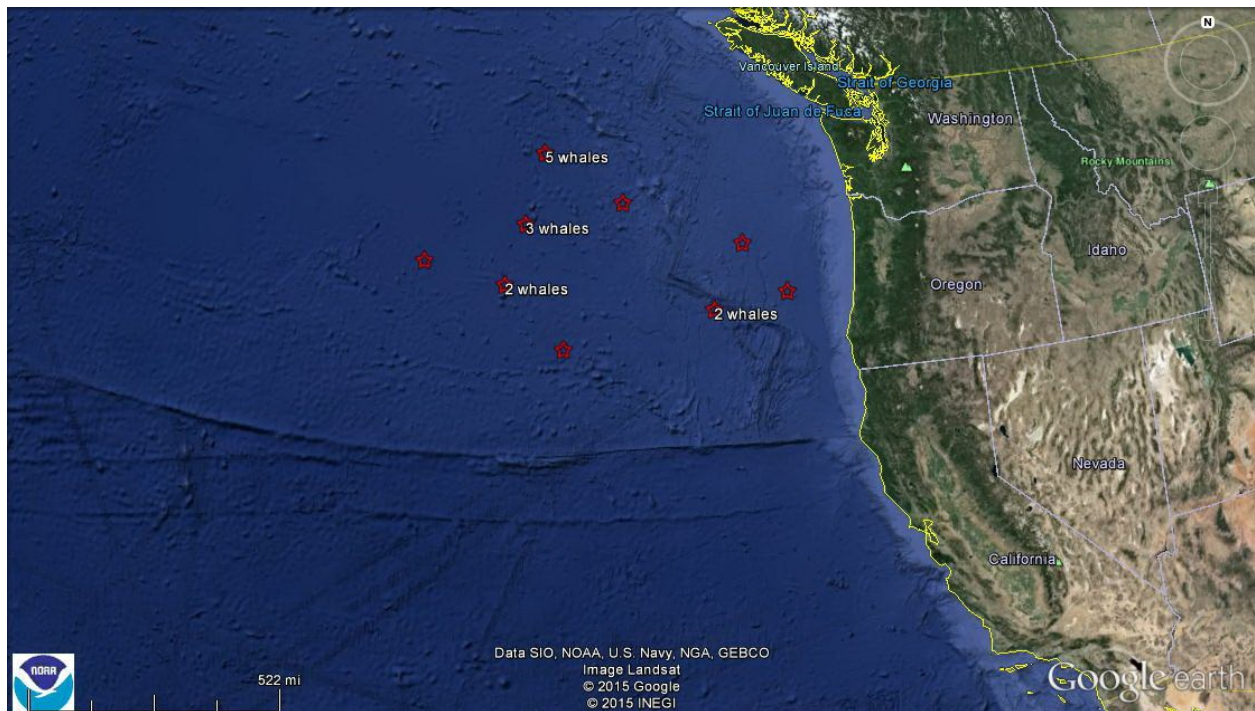


Fig. 1. Locations of previously unreported Soviet blue whale catches in 1972. Stars with no text represent single animals.

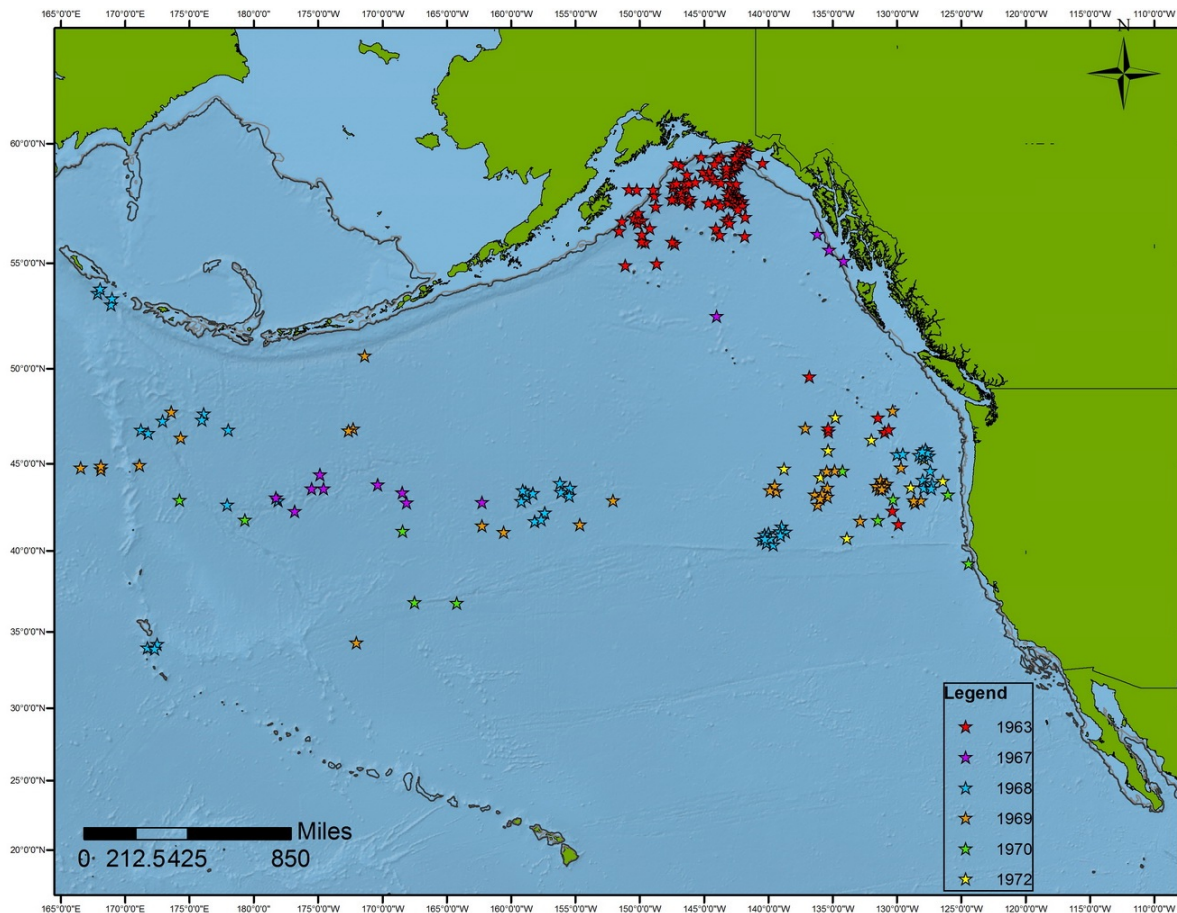


Fig 2. Locations of all Soviet blue whale catches ($n = 236$) for which position data exist.