



Long-time Glacier Bay whale sighted in Hawai'i

Each year, humpback whales migrate from high latitude feeding grounds such as Glacier Bay to tropical waters to breed in the winter. Most of the whales from southeastern Alaska winter in Hawai'i but some migrate to Mexico. On March 4, 2008 researchers from the non-profit Hawai'i Marine Mammal Consortium (www.hmmc.org), including Glacier Bay National Park's whale biologist Chris Gabriele, encountered a very familiar whale off the west coast of the Big Island of Hawai'i -- #564, a whale regularly seen in Glacier Bay each summer. This whale was first documented in Glacier Bay in 1977 by researcher Chuck Jurasz and nicknamed "Roundup Taylor".

To add to the excitement of the March 4th sighting, #564 was singing when he was sighted, so the HMMC researchers were able to record his song, too. Song is a display made by male humpback whales during their winter mating season in the tropics, although acoustic studies at Glacier Bay have shown that song is frequently heard in late summer and early fall on the southeastern Alaska feeding grounds. When song has been heard on a hydrophone anchored year-round in lower Glacier Bay, usually the singer's identity is unknown because the recordings are made remotely. Thus it is possible that #564 has been recorded singing before, in Alaska, but there is no way to know for sure.

Whale #564 was already known to be a male from Glacier Bay studies because he had never been seen with a calf in more than 30 years. His sex was confirmed with genetic analysis of a few shreds of his skin which were sloughed when he breached in Glacier Bay in 1997. Park researchers have seen #564 in Glacier Bay every year, including 2007, and in prior years he has been sighted by other research groups in Hawai'i. Even though many humpbacks from Glacier Bay have been documented in Hawai'i from later matching of fluke photos, identifying a known whale at the time of observation is rare simply because of the sheer number of whales that congregate in Hawai'i from feeding grounds across the central North Pacific.



#564 off the Big Island, 4 March 2008

*Photo courtesy of Hawai'i Marine Mammal Consortium.
Image obtained under NMFS scientific research permit
782-1719, issued to the National Marine Mammal
Laboratory.**



#564 in Glacier Bay, 30 June 2007

*Image obtained under NMFS scientific research permit
945-1776, issued to Glacier Bay National Park.**

* Note: Full captions must accompany any publication of these photographs.