

Continued from Page 4

breeding and feeding. They birth their calves in the shallow lagoons of Mexico, where warm water helps young whales grow to be strong enough to swim in the spring before migrating north. The majority of these whales are heading to the Arctic circle, while a minority of resident whales, who are rather fascinating to scientists because of their unique behavior, choose to stay in Oregon for the summer.

Satellite tagging

Daniel M. Palacios is a professor at the Marine Mammal Institute at Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center. "Whale watching is a wonderful activity," Palacios said, "but it serves a dual purpose." Palacios referenced the work of Bruce Mate, a professor emeritus of biology at Oregon State. Mate founded the Whale Telemetry Group, a study done at the Marine Mammal Institute that tracked

tagged whales and other marine mammals through satellite mapping. The study found that migrating whales sometimes travel as far as Russia.

Citizen scientists

But despite breakthrough technology, scientists can't observe everything. "This is where the average citizen comes in," Palacios said. "Research is expensive and the public can submit their observations to Citizen Science. Every whale can be identified by its markings and coloring so we can document their migration patterns," he added.

Citizen Science is a tool used by scientists to collect data from the public using a crowdsourcing model. Scientists can access large amounts of submitted findings that sometimes hint at migration behavior pat-

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The Neah-Kah-Nie Mountain overlook, situated along U.S. Highway 101, is a scenic place to spot migrating whales.

terns that couldn't be collected by a single study.

Hazardous waters

A whale's journey and its particular habits are important to researchers who keep careful tabs on each whale. The whales face many hazards on their journey, from entanglement in commercial fishing operations and container ship strikes as shipping industry vessels grow exponentially in size and speed each year. Whales also pass through the dangerous high seas, expanses of ocean that don't fall under the jurisdiction of any country. Within these lawless swaths of open ocean, there are no regulations in effect to protect whales. The first ever High Seas Conservation Treaty, which would aim to protect sea life, is now under negotiation by the United Nations.

Whale watching locally

Tate Pyle, a ranger at Fort Stevens State Park, listed spring whale watching as one of

his favorite activities at the park. "In 2019, during the Spring Whale Watch week, volunteers spoke with just over 750 visitors and counted 45 whales" Pyle said. He noted that the Shipwreck of the Peter Iredale is a great place to start. Another viewing area is at Cape Disappointment State Park. Further south, Ecola State Park in Cannon Beach and the Neah-Kah-Nie Mountain overlook, just north of Manzanita, are also prime locations. Be sure to bring a pair of binoculars!

The Oregon State Parks YouTube channel will be bringing back its whale watching livestream from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. from March 21 to March 25.

For those that are new to whale watching, Pyle hopes to reassure. "Don't get discouraged if you can't spot any whales during the spring migration. During the summer months, you can still spot whales off the ocean beach and periodically from the Columbia River beach here at Fort Stevens State Park," Pyle said.

