

# Whales: Researchers monitor people-friendly gray whales

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Leigh Torres, principal investigator at the Megafauna Lab. "These whales have interesting lives that we've learned a lot about over the years through our research."

Most gray whales in the Eastern North Pacific population cruise along Oregon's coast as they migrate south in December and January to breeding grounds in Mexico and back north in March to feeding grounds in the Bering and Chukchi seas between Alaska and Russia, where they spend the summer.

Torres and her team study a distinct population of gray whales known as the Pacific Coast Feeding Group, which spends the summer months feeding in the coastal waters of Oregon, as well as northern California, Washington, and southern Canada.

Torres and her research team have been observing and conducting annual health checkups on the population since 2016. When they spot a defecating whale from a boat or via a drone, they follow in the animal's wake and use nets to capture samples that can be used to monitor reproduction and stress.

The drones also are used to capture images of the whales, allowing researchers to monitor the animals' body condition and behavior.

"It's a unique study system that allows us to do some really cool science," said Torres, an associate professor at the university. "We can track a lot about the whales' lives. We know their age and sex, their body condition and we can also track some of their different experiences, such as injuries or reproduction."

Torres and her team have

catalogued about 190 whales, each with its own name and identification number, in the Pacific Coast Feeding Group. Some whales have become so well known, the researchers – and in some cases, the public – recognize them instantly.

Right now, eight of the well-known whales are featured on IndividuWhale. One of them is Scarlett, also sometimes known as Scarback, who is frequently seen in the Depoe Bay and Newport areas.

"We've seen her every year that we've gone out on the water," said Lisa Hildebrand, a doctoral student who helped create the new website. "She's a resilient whale who recovered from this huge wound on her back and then was able to successfully reproduce."

Another whale, Roller Skate, was first identified as a calf in 2015. In 2019, she was spotted with fishing line entangling her fluke. In 2020, the researchers documented her again in the same area.

"She survived a very gnarly, embedded wound, and part of her fluke was effectively amputated," Hildebrand said. "She dives differently now than she did before the injury."



Torres

# Polar Plunge set this month at Coffenbury Lake

Special Olympics Oregon is sponsoring the 2022 Polar Plunge at 8 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 29, at Coffenbury Lake in Fort Stevens State Park.

Sponsors describe it as "Or-

egon's beloved winter tradition of plunging into frigid waters each winter" as a way to raise money and awareness for Special Olympics.

To register or learn more, go to [plungeoregon.org](http://plungeoregon.org).



**POLAR PLUNGE**

## Obituary

### NANCY FALETTI Warrenton

Longtime Warrenton resident Nancy Faletti died Nov. 23 in McMinnville.

She was born to Howard and Charlotte Kerr in April 1948 in Ontario, Ore. After graduating from Grant Union High School in John Day, the family moved to Pendleton.

She graduated with an associate's degree in business and accounting from Eastern Oregon College in La Grande in 1968. After graduation, she worked as a payroll clerk at Kerns Furniture in Pendleton.

Nancy was introduced to her future husband, Dennis Faletti, in the summer of 1970 while visiting a college friend in Caldwell, Idaho. Dennis taught music at Riverside High School in Boardman.

They married July 31, 1971, at the Pendleton Free Meth-



odist Church. She loved to tell the story about how hot it was that day – a record of 113 degrees, so hot that the air conditioning quit at the end of the ceremony.

The couple moved to Warrenton in 1972, where she worked as a loan officer at First Federal Savings and Loan Association in Astoria.

When their son, Tony, was born in 1977, she took a leave of absence to be at home with him. She volunteered as a teaching assistant in his classes.

Eventually she rejoined the workforce as a crafts supervisor at the former Coast to Coast store in Warrenton. After retiring, she became assistant secretary at Fort Stevens Military Museum in 1998 and stayed there 20 years.

She really enjoyed working at the museum because she

loved talking to people, her family said. As a result, she made friends with people from throughout the United States who volunteered at Fort Stevens State Park.

Her hobbies included sewing and gardening and has planted 100 dahlias in her back yard each year.

Mrs. Faletti is survived by her husband, Dennis of Warrenton; a son, Tony of Warrenton; and a sister, Jackie Smith of Hermiston.

A gathering of family and friends will be held from noon to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 22, at Warrenton Community Center, 170 S.W. Third St. Ocean View Funeral and Cremation Services is in charge of arrangements.

Memorial contributions may be made to Lower Columbia Hospice, 2111 Exchange St., Astoria 97103; or to Clatsop Animal Assistance, P.O. Box 622, Warrenton 97146.

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