

Exploring one of the earth's most elusive and remarkable creatures

Awe-inspiring creatures are threatened

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

SEASIDE — Seattle-based investigative journalist and author David Neiwert knows a lot about orcas, or killer whales, some of which he shared during a presentation on his recently published book, "Of Orcas and Men: What Killer Whales Can Teach Us," at the Seaside Public Library.

More than two dozen audience members left the presentation Thursday having learned a thing or two about the carnivorous mammals, as well. They learned the scientific name *Orcinus orca* reflects Western civilization's early fear of the whales, as the Latin roughly translates into killer or messenger from hell. They also learned orcas are successful predators in the waters they roam and have complex social structures.

Neiwert, the author of several books and a contributing writer for the Southern Poverty Law Center, is a longtime nature enthusiast. "Of Orcas and Men" combined scientific research, cultural history and environmental reporting to explore one of the earth's most elusive and remarkable creatures.

"These creatures inspire awe, even when you see them in captivity, behind the glass and concrete tank," Neiwert said. "They're still so large and so beautiful and so intelligent that they have a real presence about them."

Smart and sensitive

Orcas inhabit every ocean on the planet and are the apex predator in those environments, Neiwert said. Their success is aided by their social structures and enormous size — adult male orcas grow to be about 32 feet long and weigh between 12,000 and 14,000 pounds and adult female orcas grow to be about 24 feet long and 8,000 pounds. Orcas originally were grouped into one species, but scientists since have learned they are part of a species complex, comprised

of different ecotypes. Some scientists believe the cultural and genetic differences between the ecotypes are so pronounced they are fundamentally different species.

In the Pacific Northwest, there are three different types of orcas: the southern orcas who reside along the entire West Coast; Bigg's, or transient, orcas; and offshore orcas. There are multiple other populations elsewhere across the world.

Orcas are very empathetic and intelligent, Neiwert said. They have a capacity for echolocation that is akin to a sixth sense.

"We're just starting to delve into how deep and complex this sense is," Neiwert said.

Their societies are complex and matriarchal. The mammals have a unique sense of self, different from what land mammals experience, he said.

"We tend to experience things as individuals," Neiwert said. "Their sense of self is really bound up in each other. This is why their pods are so important, so critical to their social lives. They remain with their families their entire lives."

A changing perception

The human relationship to orcas has varied throughout time and cultures. Some coastal indigenous cultures respected the orcas as their ancestors and creatures of great spiritual and physical power. The Greeks saw orcas as terrifying and demonic messengers of hell, the antithesis of angelic and sacred dolphins — although orcas are part of the oceanic dolphin family. By the 20th century, it was not unusual for people in the Pacific Northwest to shoot orcas, Neiwert said. The movie "Orca," produced by Dino De Laurentiis, shows how little the general public knew about the mammals, even into the 1970s.

Many people interact only with orcas in captivity, which is "nothing like seeing the animal in its real element," said Neiwert, who has spent a lot of time observing and researching the orcas in the Pacific Northwest.



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Seattle-based author and investigative journalist David Neiwert gives a presentation on orcas at the Seaside Public Library Thursday. He shared information from his recently published book, "Of Orcas and Men: What Killer Whales Can Teach Us," about the history of orcas and their relationship to various cultures throughout history.

The initial captivity of orcas, such as Namu, one of the first killer whales to be put in an aquarium in the 1960s, helped change the public perception of the mammals. Many people became enamored with them, perceiving them as sort of aquatic panda bears, Neiwert said. For the orcas, however, putting them in SeaWorld theme parks, the Miami Seaquarium and other marine parks is detrimental because of their size, intelligence and complex social structure. Their life spans on average are significantly shorter; they exhibit signs of frustration, grinding their teeth or, on rare occasions, harming humans in their tanks, Neiwert said.

Some people in the captive-orca industry disagree the environment negatively affects the mammals. They claim they are educating children about orcas. However, the presentations give limited information about the whales themselves, Neiwert said.

"What they're actually selling is this spectacle: the spectacle of humans seemingly controlling these large and amazing animals," he said. "But all the trainers I've ever talked to, that have left Sea-

World, will tell you it's purely an illusion. The orcas are very much in charge."

One whale taken from the Puget Sound named Tokitae, renamed Lolita, remains in captivity in the Miami Seaquarium, and there is a campaign for her release. She is the only whale from a batch of about 58 southern orcas taken in the 1970s that still lives; the others died.

From other efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate whales who got lost or were put in captivity, scientists believe it is very important for the orcas to be reunited with their natal pods. Is it possible Lolita would recognize her family after a roughly 40-year separation? Neiwert said they don't know definitively, but giving it a try would help scientists learn a lot about orcas. And he believes Lolita would be better off, no matter the outcome.

When groups took the 58 southern orcas, like Lolita, to sell to SeaWorld and other marine parks, it was discovered there only were 78 remaining. Because they were catching young calves, they removed nearly an entire generation and the population has not recovered, Neiwert said.

Aquarium staff says sea turtle is 'hanging in there'

EO Media Group Staff

A hypothermic sea turtle rescued in Cannon Beach in mid-December and taken to the Seattle Aquarium for treatment is doing better, spurring a little optimism, according to aquarium staff.

As of early January, the turtle was still alive. Keith Chandler, general manager of the Seaside Aquarium, contacted the Seattle Aquarium, where the turtle was taken after being rescued Dec. 14, and he was told staff was "hopeful" about the turtle's recovery. It is under the care of Dr. Lesanna Lahner, Seattle Aquarium's veterinarian.

Staff at the Seaside Aquarium rescued the male olive ridley sea turtle after it washed ashore south of Tolovana, likely pushed into colder waters by recent strong winds, aquarium Administrative Assistant Tiffany Boothe said. Juvenile olive ridleys sometimes travel in warm currents offshore.

"With the weather patterns, we weren't surprised to find one," Boothe said.

Seaside Aquarium staff wrapped turtle in blankets and slowly warmed it to avoid shock while awaiting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pickup.

Live turtles are normally taken to the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, but aquarium staff are already rehabilitating one found in Pacific City earlier this month. Newport and Seattle's aquariums are the only Pacific Northwest rehabilitation facilities authorized to provide the care sea turtles need.

Chandler said the survival chances for Tolovana's turtle are slim. At this stage, hypothermic and often injured in the surf, there's a 75 to 90 percent mortality rate for the turtles.

But if the Tolovana turtle survives, it will also be released into Californian waters. The reptiles often hitch a ride with an agency such as the U.S. Coast Guard during a training trip, said Laura Todd, Newport Field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

She noted that Cannon Beach's turtle was at 50 degrees when it arrived in Seattle. The turtle's normal temperature is in the low 70s.

Sea life rescuers expect to see more of the endangered turtles beached along the coast with this year's El Niño. Todd said the turtles normally remain south of San Diego. However, she added, they do sometimes travel farther north in warm currents searching for food.

"When the conditions are right for one, they're right for several," Chandler said.

Last year, five sea turtles were found off the coast. Three were dead upon arrival and one died in transit. The fifth was successfully transported to San Diego.

On Monday, Dec. 21, two more olive ridley turtles arrived in the area, one in Seaview, Wash., and the other near Del Rey Beach, bringing the total to four for this year. Both were transported to the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

The one from Seaview had a head injury and died a few days after arriving at the aquarium. The one from Del Rey, who was found shortly after being washed ashore, Chandler said, was still alive and "doing OK" as of Dec. 30.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service urges anyone who finds a sea turtle on the beach to contact the Oregon State Police Wildlife Hotline at 800-452-7888.

SEASIDE POLICE LOG

Dec. 21
12:42 p.m., 2100 block of North Holladay Drive: Officer assisted Seaside Fire Department with clearing downed tree.

5:32 p.m., 400 block of Broadway: Officer made contact with subject. He was verbally warned for riding the wrong way on the sidewalk with his bicycle.

5:36 p.m., 600 block of South Holladay Drive: Officer assisted other agency with motor vehicle versus pedestrian accident.

Dec. 22
12:40 a.m., Necanicum Estuary: Subject was advised of unlawful lodging ordinance.

4:40 p.m., 2500 block of Millcreek Lane: Caller reported disturbance with boyfriend. Officer made contact with both parties and it was verbal in nature only.

Dec. 23
10:12 a.m., North Roosevelt Drive: Report of a vehicle that was crossing the fog line and was not maintaining the lane. Officers advised, searching for the vehicle. Officers unable to locate the vehicle.

Dec. 24
12:52 a.m., 800 block of South Roosevelt: Officer contacted disabled vehicle. Everything was fine.

2:57 p.m., 900 block of Beach Drive: Caller upset with neighbor putting "No Parking" notices on cars, which are parked on public street. Officer unable to make contact at residence at this time.

8:09 p.m., 300 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Officer responded to report of suspicious male that staff wanted to be asked to leave. Upon officer arrival subject was already

gone. Officer contacted subject outside and at the request of staff advised subject he was trespassed for the evening.

Dec. 25
11:54 a.m., Oregon Route 53: 911 caller reported a disabled vehicle on Highway 53, right after the driver of the vehicle called to say everyone is ok, tow truck on the way. Oregon State Police advised.

3:46 p.m., 400 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Officer picked up found property that contained drug paraphernalia brought to Seaside Police Department.

5:15 p.m., 900 block of 13th Avenue: Caller reported hearing fireworks in the area. Officer made contact and issued warning.

Dec. 26
10:40 a.m., 1300 block of South Downing: Caller requested welfare check on a tenant that hadn't been seen for a week. Turns out the subject is safe in the Clatsop County Jail. Caller was notified of subject's whereabouts.

12:42 p.m., 800 block of South Holladay Drive: Caller reported a subject acting oddly, Officer made contact and subjects vehicle had broken down and they would move it soon.

3:35 p.m., 1300 block of North Holladay Drive: Caller reported neighbor waving a box of bullets at them. Officer was advised and drove to the area. Neighbor agreed to report anything suspicious they saw. Units clear.

8:50 p.m., 300 block of South Columbia Street: An anonymous caller reported a disturbance. Officers responded it was a verbal argument, parties warned about noise.

Dec. 27
12:27 a.m., U.S. Highway 11: Officer assisted Oregon State Police with traffic stop.

2:03 p.m., 300 block of Broadway: Caller reported subject walking on street with a rifle over shoulder, no other suspicious activity. Officer checked area downtown but did not locate subject.

7:08 p.m., 400 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Caller reported theft of goods and subjects left in vehicle southbound. Officer responded and checked area to the south but did not locate described vehicle.

Dec. 28
2:43 p.m., 2100 block of South Franklin Drive: Caller reported loud music from neighbor. Officer made contact and subject agreed to turn the music down.

3:06 p.m., Holladay Drive near U.S. Highway 101: Caller report an erratic driver. Officer checked area but did not locate vehicle.

Dec. 29
4:04 a.m., 1400 block of Roosevelt Drive: While on patrol, officer made contact with suspicious persons. Person was cleaning crew for restaurant.

4:20 p.m., 1100 block of North Roosevelt Drive: Officer responded to 911 report of subject causing a disturbance. Officer advised subject would be trespassed indefinitely from the area.

5:27 p.m., 1600 block of Spruce Drive: Officer responded to dog versus vehicle accident and made contact with owner of dog who took custody of animal.

9:37 p.m., 1600 block of North Franklin Street: Officer assisted in returning care home resident back to facility.

Dec. 30
3:47 a.m., 1800 block of Huckleberry Drive: Officer assisted on fire call.

1:45 p.m., 400 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Report of a subject acting strangely in the parking lot, possibly impaired by a controlled substance. Subject contacted and trespassed forever.

Dec. 31
10:35 p.m., 300 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Caller reporting subject acting suspiciously around storm drain. Officer advised subject was putting out fire that had occurred within his camper caused by an ember that had attached to his sweatshirt when he took it off. All was fine, fire was out.

11:02 p.m., 500 block of Broadway: Officer responded to verbal disturbance and advised argument over what subjects were going to do. Officer advised they knew the address of where they were staying and were headed that way.

11:45 p.m., 1000 South Holladay Drive: Officer responded to report of intoxicated subject brought to police department from cab company. Medix was called and subject was taken to hospital due to his level of intoxication.

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