

INFORMATION TO HELP YOU WATCH MARINE MAMMALS AND OTHER WILDLIFE AROUND:

Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station Bulletin No. 6

Welcome To The Grand Manan Area

Please accept this material from the **Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station** as an aid to your enjoyment of our waters and the wildlife it supports. Should you decide to whale watch, the enclosed information will assist you to view whales in an appropriate manner and coordinate your activities with commercial whale watchers.

CODE OF ETHICS. In the Bay of Fundy, commercial whale watch operators abide by a voluntary Code of Ethics. This Code was developed in 1997 to ensure that the growing whale watch industry did not adversely affect the whale population in the Bay and that whale watchers would receive the best possible experience. If you are planning to do some whale watching try one of the whale watches available. If you are using your own boat remember to keep this Code in mind. In the Grand Manan and Nova Scotia area (Digby Neck to Brier Island) whale watch vessels standby on VHF Channel 11. In the Quoddy Region (Campobello and Deer Islands, St. Andrews, St. George, etc.), whale watchers standby on VHF Channel 78.

RIGHT WHALES. We are fortunate to have a large number of right whales in the Bay most summers but these whales are highly endangered. The enclosed information will help explain their plight. Many mothers and calves use the Bay as a nursery area. Two Conservation Zones for right whales exists, one off southwestern Nova Scotia and one in the Bay of Fundy. It is always best to be cautious and conservative when watching right whales to avoid any negative impact to the whales, particularly when mothers and calves are in the area. It is also important to report sightings of right whales to **Fundy Traffic, VHF Channel 14**. They monitor the location of right whales and warn shipping traffic into and out of the port of Saint John about the presence of right whales, particularly in the shipping lanes. The information to report is the name of your vessel, location in latitude and longitude and the number of right whales present. If the whales are over a larger area you can include an estimate of the area covered.

ENTANGLED WHALES. If you encounter an entangled whale it is best to leave it alone but if possible stay within sight of the animal, ideally until another vessel can take your place. **Do not attempt to disentangle the whale.** Please contact the



Department of Fisheries and Oceans through Canadian Coast Guard **Fundy Radio, VHF Channel 16**, or by calling the **Maritime Animal Response Society 1-866-567-6277**. Any photo-documentation may also be helpful. You may be asked the following questions:

- What kind of whale is it and if you are with the whale, what is your location? If not, when and where did you last see the whale?
- Is the whale anchored? If not, what direction was it traveling?
- Can you see lines or gear? If so describe the gear (rope, floats, buoys, etc.)
- Where is the gear? Flippers, body, tail stock, mouth, over the head, etc.
- Is the whale able to breathe?
- Are there any other vessels in the area? This is particularly important if you can not standby the whale.

DEAD WHALES. If you encounter a dead whale please follow the same contact information above. Dead whales can be scientifically examined and the data obtained used to determine how the whale lived and died.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION. We have also included a simple picture key and tables to help you identify marine mammals in the Bay of Fundy. Blue fin tuna, ocean sunfish, leatherback turtles, and basking sharks are also pictured because they do occur at the surface at times and can be confused with marine mammals when seen briefly. Basking sharks are also known to breach as some whales do. If you wish to contribute your observations to a data base of sightings for the Bay of Fundy, please send to the address below. We are also interested in sightings that occur outside of the Bay of Fundy, particularly right whales.



MUSEUM AND RESEARCH CENTRE. For more information about whales and marine life in the Grand Manan area, please visit our research facility located in North Head across from the ferry ticket office. Our Gaskin Museum of Marine Life is open daily for your enjoyment. We have included information describing a bit of what we do.

Research: Dedicated to scientific investigation of marine life in the Bay of Fundy with emphasis on threatened and endangered marine mammals such as the *Harbour Porpoise* and *Right Whale*.

and Education: through interpretative displays, scientific and popular reports, lectures, slide presentations, and web site.

to Promote Conservation of the marine ecosystem in the Bay of Fundy.



The Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station (GMWSRS) is a non-profit research facility located in North Head, Grand Manan. The GMWSRS was founded in 1981 by the late Dr. David Gaskin, a professor at the University of Guelph, Ontario and a pioneer of harbour porpoise research. Since 1981, the research station has conducted research on harbour porpoises, right whales, seals and seabirds in the Grand Manan Archipelago. The GMWSRS has a proven track record of community-based stewardship/conservation initiatives and was awarded a

Gulf of Maine Visionary Award by the Gulf of Maine Council in 2001. Our researchers are part of a highly trained international team with expertise in many fields. Numerous projects are underway at any given time, primarily in the summer/fall period. At other times, researchers are usually elsewhere; however, our managing director lives on Grand Manan and is involved in local community efforts and activities.

The Harbour Porpoise Release Program (HPRP) was developed by the GMWSRS and has been assisting Grand Manan weir fishermen with the safe release of porpoises since 1991. The program is a collaborative effort between local fishermen, industry, conservation biologists and community organisations whose shared goal is to encourage practices within the herring weir fishery that promote the conservation and recovery of harbour porpoises in the Bay of Fundy. The program has also been beneficial in the development of protocols for the safe release of large whales such as minke, humpback and right whales.

In addition we are involved in right whale conservation efforts including the Canadian Right Whale Network, large whale disentanglement network, wildlife environmental emergency plans and whale watch ethics. We also support seabird monitoring projects, harbour porpoise research and public outreach. The latter is partially through the Gaskin Museum of Marine Life, a celebration of the lower Bay of Fundy and its biodiversity, focusing on some of the more charismatic species, such as the right whale. We also offer the Gaskin Fellowship each summer for local students to gain experience in marine biology.

Our facility is capable of housing researchers during the summer and is conveniently located across from the ferry ticket office.

We hope that your visit to the Grand Manan area is enjoyable and that some of the included information will be of benefit to you.

Summary of Fisheries and Oceans Whale Watch Guidelines:

These guidelines apply to anyone engaged in whale watching. Legislation for whale watch regulations is pending. The Species at Risk Act may also influence activities around endangered species. **Please check with the local Fisheries Officers for additional information.**

- Do not hunt, chase, follow, disperse, drive, herd or encircle the whales.
- Avoid any sudden changes of course or speed and sudden stops in reverse speed.
- Avoid heading directly toward a whale.
- If in an area known to be frequented by whales, post a lookout to avoid collisions.
- Travel parallel to whales.
- The whales may come close to you: if they do, do not chase them. These animals may be calves that approach while their mothers are submerged feeding. Keep clear of the tail.



- If you are operating a sailing vessel with an auxiliary motor, leaving it in idle or turn on the echo sounder to signal your presence.
- If it is not possible to detour around a whale or group of whales, slow down immediately and wait until you are more than 400 m (1300') away before resuming speed.
- Limit the time spent with a particular whale or group of whales.

| Animal's Behaviour | Guidelines | 100m | 200m | 400m |
|---|---|------------------------|------|------|
| Resting | No approach. Keep a minimal distance | - | - | X |
| | | - | - | X X |
| Moving (feeding, travelling, etc.) | Advance slowly using an oblique line | - | - | X |
| | | - | - | X X |
| | Minimal distance for observation | X | - | - |
| | | - | X X | - |
| | Observation, motor on neutral | X | - | - |
| | | - | X X | - |
| Progressive acceleration | - | - | X | |
| | - | - | X X | |
| Key: | X One Boat (up to 10 kayaks in a group) | X X More than one Boat | | |

CODE of ETHICS for Bay of Fundy Water-based Tour Operators

The purpose of this code is to foster an environment of co-operation and trust among water-based tour operators for the protection and safety of the whales and other marine wildlife, and the safety and understanding of their passengers. Tour operators agree to abide by this code for the protection and preservation of whales and the marine environment, and the education of their passengers and other boat operators. Adherence to this code demonstrates care and concern for whale conservation. **It is highly recommended that private individuals also abide by this code when watching whales.**

Definitions: A **vessel** will be defined as either a motorised vessel or a kayak group. A **kayak group** is defined as no more than 10 kayaks paddling in a co-ordinated group.



- The first vessel to locate a whale or group of whales will have first viewing priority. The vessel is under no obligation to announce the location of the whales to other operators.
- No more than two vessels will view a whale or group of whales at a time within 100m of the whale or group. If the whales are travelling, the viewing vessels will maintain a respectable distance to avoid herding the animals.
- A maximum of 30 minutes will be spent viewing a whale or group of whales if more than two vessels are in the immediate vicinity. Passengers will be informed that we are moving off to allow other vessels to view the whale and that we must avoid crowding the animals and endangering their safety. Motorised vessels will also take care not to crowd or endanger the safety of kayakers.
- Any whale showing avoidance behaviour such as turning away or increasing speed will be left alone.
- All operators will stand-by on a designated VHF radio channel for purposes of communication when one vessel is viewing or waiting to view a more than whale or group of whales, and we will co-ordinate the selection of the channel with whale watch vessels from other areas in the Bay of Fundy.
- Vessels approaching another vessel already engaged in whale watching will contact that vessel and arrange viewing priority.
- A fair distance will be kept when waiting to view so as not to crowd the whale or viewing vessels. While waiting tour operators will engage in other activities such as sea bird and seal viewing, or conservation education.
- When vessels are stopping to listen for whale blows in the fog, as a courtesy other vessels in the immediate vicinity will do the same.



- Vessels will cover different areas as much as possible so that not all vessels will be converging on the same location.
- In the vicinity of fixed fishing gear whales will not be herded in the direction of the gear.

Pointers for Small Boats (including Kayakers) Near Whales



1. Remember that whales are wild animals, should be treated with respect and given a wide berth.
2. Although whales are seldom aggressive unless provoked, their massive size can be inadvertently dangerous to small vessels. If you are unsure of what the whale is doing it is best to keep your distance.
3. When kayaking always stay in a group to prevent herding the whale and to increase personal safety.
4. Never aggressively approach a whale. You may get more than you bargained for.
5. Make your presence known to the whale by simple tapping on the kayak or side of the boat. Whales have very keen hearing and will detect slight noises unless preoccupied with other activities.
6. Always approach a whale from the side, never from behind. A whale's most powerful part is its tail. Whales are blind from behind or directly in front. Their eyes are well below the water's surface.
7. Never deliberately paddle or motor over a whale. If you startle the whale it will try to leave or see what is over it. The pressure wave from the whale's movement can be dangerous.
8. If a whale surfaces under your kayak or small boat, stay calm and wait for the whale to set the vessel down. Try to leave the area or head to shore if the whale persists. Leave something at the surface to divert the whale's attention if necessary. If you end up in the water, stay calm and wait for someone to pick you up or help you back in your boat.
9. Never move toward a whale active at the surface - lunge feeding, breaching, tail lobbing, flipper slapping. The whale may not expect you to be there and accidents can happen. Usually the whale is aware of your presence but it will be less cautious when engaged in active behaviours.
10. Do not approach a courtship group of right whales and be alert for whales leaving or joining the group. Males can be very aggressive in large courtship groups and may regard you as a competitor. Calves are sometimes involved in these groups and can get confused and breach unexpectedly. Females will sometimes use objects, including boats, at the surface as part of the courtship "chase".
11. Remain calm and quiet, unless a whale approaches without acknowledging your presence and you are in danger of collision. Whales have keen hearing and do hear voices, paddle strokes, etc.
12. Never approach a "sleeping" whale, i.e. a whale lying quietly at the surface. These should not be disturbed, and if awakened suddenly, may behave unexpectedly.

GMWSRS Bulletin No. 6. **Information for Boaters Visiting the Area to Whale Watch.**
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