

## **May 2009 - Wildlife Reports**

Lifeforce has started our Marine Life Programs for 2009 and will provide monthly Wildlife Reports. We hope to show you the many wildlife encounters that we experience. This could range from the mammoth Gray Whales to the tiny, tiny hummingbirds.

Our first report starts with two stories. The first appeared in the June All Point Bulletin that is a local Point Roberts/Richmond newspaper. "Wild at the Point" is a Lifeforce regular article and the "50% Less Protection for Orcas" is a special article that I wrote about the ongoing plight of orcas who are in desperate need for more protection.

### **Wild at the Point**

*By Peter Hamilton, Lifeforce Founder*

*Published June All Point Bulletin*

The diversity of wildlife around Point Roberts continues to be nature's amazing gift for all to enjoy.

One of the "biggest sights" to see has been the Gray whales in Boundary Bay. The four whales are up to 45 feet long and feed in the shallow waters. They dig into the sand collecting benthic amphipods. They strain the sand through strips of plate-like baleen hanging down from their upper jaw. Their life span may be approximately 70 years.

The best way to watch grays is to float with engine off and not follow. They can be underwater for up to 15 minutes and may surface by a quiet boat.

After a 44 day absence, J pod returned on May 4<sup>th</sup> to nearby waters. They have past the Point several times since then. There are two new babies in this pod. They are hanging out with six members of K pod. Usually by mid-June L pod will return and the other Ks may be with them. There are only approximately 85 orcas in all three pods. And to answer all those questions - "What time do the orcas come?" - there is no regular time. And to those who have actually said that orcas don't pass at low tide because there is not enough water or if they pass at high tide you won't see them because they are under the water – not true!

A visit to Lighthouse Marine Park will bring you encounters with Harbour porpoises who are often close to shore. In May there were hundreds of Harbour porpoises all over the Georgia Strait. To the south, off Patos Island, nearly 200 hundred were seen. Stellar sea lions will swim by on occasion while harbour seals are seen more regularly.

Both adult Bald eagles and young eagles with brown plumage will sit on the former dock pilings and the navigation light. It takes up to 5 years to get the distinct adult plumage. Great Blue Herons may be found along the beach. Cormorants, Brant Geese, loons

and sea ducks may be floating offshore. The Mallard goslings are growing up but are still under mom's watchful eye in the campground pond.

A walk around the park and the point will bring sightings of numerous bird species. May sightings included the Northern Harrier flying in the park and west side marina fields, eagles and herons almost everywhere especially during low tides off the west and east sides, barn swallows swooping to catch flies in the park and marina, and a Belted Kingfisher sitting on the sailboat masts. I also saw Spotted Towhees, Northern Flickers, hummingbirds, sparrows, chickadees, and finches. The vocal Killdeer were faking broken wings to lead people away from their nests. The brown "bunnies" are Eastern Cottontails and were hopping about too.

You should also keep a watch for the deer. Last year there was a fawn with two adults. They have been spotted at various spots on the west side of the Point.

### **Respect and Enjoy Wildlife**

Point Roberts is a bit of paradise. While we marvel at the wonders of wildlife please don't approach, feed or try to touch. They may look cute but they can cause severe injuries. Junk food can kill them. So respect and enjoy them from a distance.

Lifeforce Wildlife Reports, Nature Moments videos, and Wildpeace photographs are available at [www.lifeforcefoundation.org](http://www.lifeforcefoundation.org).

*Note: This is the first article about wildlife on and around the point. Look for more Wildlife Reports in the coming months or call Lifeforce at 604-649-5258 for current information. Donations are greatly appreciated and can be sent to Lifeforce, Box 121, Point Roberts, 98281 or Box 3117, Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6.*

### **View Point**

#### **50% Less Protection for Orcas**

*By Peter Hamilton, Lifeforce Founder*

In spite of campaigns to get more funding to protect orcas there has been a recent major blow to the orcas. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will have to cut their whale patrols by approximately 50% in 2009. WDFW has historically received funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) for "Outreach and Education Patrols". NOAA Headquarters cut the NOAA Protected Resources' budget severely for some unknown reason. This will leave WDFW struggling to enforce orca protection legislation and the orcas struggling to survive.

When a species is less than 1000 the population's gene pool is severely restricted and they are extremely vulnerable. This could lead to extinction. The local Southern Community of orcas

numbers approximately 85 members. It appears inevitable that they will be gone within 50 years or sooner if hit with continue food loss, an oil spill and other human impacts.

In 2008, the Lifeforce petition was sent to Governor Gregoire. Signees urged Governor Gregoire to direct enforcement agencies to enforce marine mammal protection provisions and to establish a 1/2 mile voluntary boat exclusion zone in waters surrounding Point Roberts. As of June 15, 2008 it is illegal to be in the vicinity of orcas within 100 meters. If orcas are heading towards you must slowly move out of their way.

In February 2009 Lifeforce followed up by releasing a report entitled "Contact: In Pursuit of Orcas". In 2008 Lifeforce gathered conclusive evidence of flagrant disregard for the well being of orcas and the laws by whale watch companies. Pleasure boats imitate these illegal practises. The report is at [http://www.lifeforcefoundation.org/files/INPURSUITORCASJAN2009\\_sm..](http://www.lifeforcefoundation.org/files/INPURSUITORCASJAN2009_sm..). Photographic evidence collected by Lifeforce led to fines against one Victoria-based whale watch company.

For the third year Governor Gregoire has declared June 2009 as "Orca Awareness Month" in Washington State. It's a great gesture but putting up enforcement money to increase WDFW boat time on the water is needed more than a proclamation hanging on a wall.

Please write to former Washington Governor and present US Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is under the Department of Commerce and they have provided the historic funding to WDFW for orca protection. Urge Secretary Locke to provide sufficient funds to WDFW. His email is: [TheSec@doc.gov](mailto:TheSec@doc.gov)

Boats in violation of whale watch legislation. Whale Watch Companies are suppose be at least 100 meters from orcas.





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### **Other May Work and Encounters**

During the first weekend back on the water we were monitoring boat traffic and the behaviour of gray whales in Boundary Bay, BC. I watched at least one of the grays who I also saw in this bay in 2005.

Poor weather and other important work kept us away in April which our usual start up time. The poor economy is also reducing our donations and therefore our presence on the water. But some calm water days ease me gently back into the same work patterns.

May 9<sup>th</sup> – Grays Whales were in Boundary Bay, BC. Whale Watch companies were there because the orcas had not been located. Later in afternoon the orcas were found a further south near Alden Bank. J pod was there with 6 members of K pod. At the end of the day the orcas switched directions and I had some good sights while travelling back north to the marina with them.

May 10 – Orcas had past the Point in the morning. Lifeforce was the only boat with them as the same group who was seen yesterday headed into Rosario Strait. The Whale Watch companies did not locate them until a few hours later – the orcas got a morning off.

The following are photos of a sea lion south of Boundary Bay and Western Sandpipers in the bay.



I left them and went to see the grays in Boundary Bay. They were surrounded by Whale Watch vessels. The companies from Vancouver area pursued a pair of grays and at times were motoring on both sides of them within 100 yards.



## Victoria Day Weekend

May 15<sup>th</sup> – Gray whales in Boundary Bay. They have been there since mid- April.

May 16<sup>th</sup> – In the late morning J pod and the six Ks were off Point Roberts heading south. They were quite spread out and were in 2 groups approximately 40 minutes apart. Later they were passing East Point, Saturna Island, BC. Several; boats violated the regs but no enforcement agencies were present.



There was a group of nearly two hundred Harbour Porpoise close to East Point. There were Harbour porpoises everywhere – from East to Point Roberts. There must have been a lot of feed in the area. There were also hundreds of Pacific Loons rafting on Georgia Strait.

There were Steller Sea lions and Harbour Seals at East Point. One sea lion had been branded. Hot branding is very painful. According to Peter Olesiuk, DFO, this #137Y was branded as a pup in 2002 in California. He had been seen in mid-April 2009 at Kelp Reef but prior to that the last sighting was Barkley Sound in July 2005.





May 17<sup>th</sup> – One gray whale repeatedly head viewed (lifted head vertically to water surface). Now after a few visits some common behaviours and movements were becoming obvious. Each of the 5 grays had often distinct movement patterns and area preferences. One lifted the head almost parallel the surface to view surroundings.





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While at Point Roberts a Great Blue Heron had no problem with a close-up photo, a young eagle was dangerously perched near power lines, the reddish House Finch looked scenic against the green leaves and a Northern Flicker was feeding on the roadway.



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## The US Memorial Day Weekend

May 22<sup>nd</sup> – This holiday provided some great opportunities to further study the Gray whale behaviour in Boundary Bay, BC. Once I determine the start of their socializing my camera was focus on two whales coming to meet. I was expecting a Head View as they check out their surroundings and each other but it was more incredible. A Gray Whale breach. It was so amazing since this 30 foot plus creature was only in approximately 25 feet of water. And then there were several Head Views. They also lifted their head horizontally above the water. At times you could see their pectoral fin as they roll sideways to dig into the sand bar for food.





May 23<sup>rd</sup> – It was too windy to go out on the boat because winds were gusting up to 25 mph. A crow meandered along the park grass in the sun giving one a good photo op for these very black birds. Eagles were around the park in Point Robert and a Gadwall guarded her ducklings.

May 24<sup>th</sup> – The morning brought sightings of eagles, 7 Black Oyster Catchers in flight, Brant Geese, Caspian Terns, and Harlequins Ducks.



In the afternoon I was monitoring boat around the grays in Boundary Bay when a boat appeared heading right towards them. I quickly waved our STOP SIGN paddle (as you see at road construction sites) and it stopped the boat. I advised him of the regulations. I could not give him our educational information because Customs rules prevent boats from different countries making contact (Lifeforce was from a US port and the boat was from a Canadian port). In these

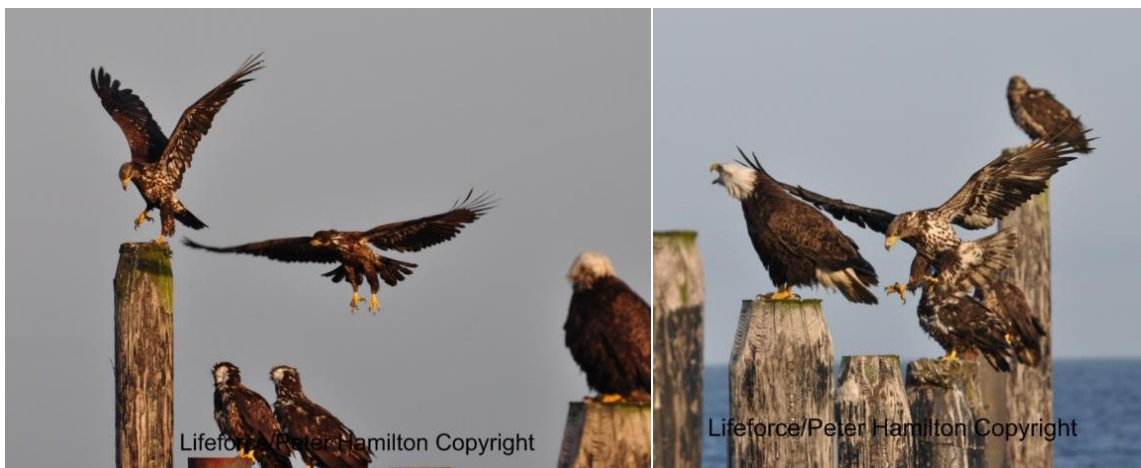
situations we advise boaters to go to our web site for information about the laws and proper boat operation around marine wildlife.

Driving back into the marina this Great Blue Heron took flight.



May 25<sup>th</sup> – Orcas past Point Roberts in the morning but it was time to head back to Canada. It would be at least 5 hours for the Whale Watch companies to find them so the orcas did get a half-day Memorial Day holiday.

And was there an Eagle Fest in Point Roberts on Memorial Day? First there were 2, then 3, then 4 and just when I thought that it couldn't get any better a fifth eagle landed. Now that's a full house.







May 30th and 31<sup>st</sup> -The last weekend of May was a pretty quiet with a Strong Wind Warning posted for most of the days and no resident orcas. On May 29<sup>th</sup> some of L pod was spotted off Port Harding and it was thought that they may head south but no further sightings were received by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Some transient orcas were off the San Juan Islands and Victoria areas on May 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

The next planned June Wildlife Report will be posted in the beginning of July.

For Freedom,  
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