

Project Update: November 2018

For the conservation of the whales, proper regulations should be created and for that baseline knowledge on the species in the area needs to be provided to local authorities. This knowledge arises from research using non-invasive techniques that allow us to elucidate different aspects of whale ecology in this area.

In 2018 the field work began in July and up to the moment of writing this report, we had registered 350 southern right whales on Miramar coast. In this period, two volunteers have been trained on land based methodologies for cetacean research. In addition, acoustic records were made using a coastguard's inflatable boat and a survey onboard a helicopter from the coastguard to photo-ID whales was undertaken.

Aerial survey of Southern right whales in Buenos Aires coast

Southern right whales have a pattern of callosities on their head. Each individual can be identified by its callosity pattern, which is unique and does not change along the whale's life. Photo-ID survey allows knowing many aspects of the whales' life in a non-invasive way. Researchers from different areas (principally nursery grounds) created photo-ID catalogues of the individuals using aerial photos. The comparison of these catalogues can reveal characteristics of life cycle and migratory routes. The first photo-ID catalogue for Miramar and Buenos Aires coast region begun in 2016 and have eight southern right whales photo-identified to date. On August 29th, a flight was carried out in a helicopter belonging to the Argentinian Coast Guard. The route included a transect 1000 m from the coast and parallel to it, between the city of Mar del Plata and Centinela del Mar. During the flight, beside photos, other data was collected: number of whales, group composition and behaviour. In total, 22 southern right whales were seen in 10 groups and photographs were taken that could be used for photo-ID. The new whales identified will be included into Miramar's catalogue and then will be compared with other areas.

Education programme

We visited different schools of Miramar, Mar del Sud and Paraje La Ballenera. Lectures about southern right whales, cetacean biology and environmental threats were given in order to generate environment awareness among the students. Also, we were in "Instituto Superior de Formación Docente y Técnica N°81" showing to biology teachers and students the project and activities carried out in the region.

We want to express our gratitude to The Rufford Foundation, Argentine Coast Guard, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Kilverstone Wildlife Charitable Trust and Fundación Cethus for the support to this project.



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Pilots, co-pilot and authority of Argentine Coast Guard and project team.



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Southern right whales. (Photo taken during the flight)