

Whales of Guerrero Research Project Internship

Winter 2016 - Deadline September 1st, 2015

Background

The Whales of Guerrero Research Project (WGRP) is a privately funded field research and community outreach project located in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, near the twin cities of Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo on the Pacific Ocean coast.

This project is the first to investigate humpback whales and other marine mammals in depth in the state of Guerrero. There is an absence of information and awareness about whales and other cetaceans among boat operators, tour guides, residents and visitors to the region.

Project Goals

The two primary goals of the Whales of Guerrero Research Project's are:

- Contribute to a better understanding of the structure, abundance, distribution and dynamics of the migratory humpback whales and other marine mammals which visit and inhabit the region.
- Raise awareness about responsible whale watching and ecotourism practices and humpback whale behavior and biology among boat operators, tour guides, educators, residents and visitors.

We will accomplish our research goals by conducting on-water and land-based field studies in the area from January through March annually for the next 4 years (winters 2015-2018). The 2016 study will include two concurrent on-water efforts to locate, photo-identify and record the songs of humpback whales and collect occurrence data on other marine mammals including four dolphin species (*Tursiops truncatus*, *Stenella attenuata*, *Steno bredanensis* and *Delphinus delphis*). The research boats will be 6-meter long fiberglass fishing pangas, driven by local fishermen, who will be participating in the project as regional experts, citizen scientists and ecotour guides in training. In addition, one land-based field study will record marine mammal occurrence and activity relative to all boats in the area. Fluke identification photos will contribute to our local fluke identification catalog as well as larger existing fluke identification catalogs maintained by research colleagues elsewhere in Mexico and the US. We will record humpback whale vocalizations to note presence/absence and also share these data with researchers elsewhere in Mexico and the US.

Data we collect will (1) help the region to become a SEMARNAT-acknowledged marine mammal site, which will garner further resources to study and protect the whales, (2) identify potentially sensitive regions for humpback whales relative to shrimp boat activity, gillnet fishing and other potentially harmful anthropogenic

activities, and (3) contribute to the larger scientific community's understanding of the Northeastern Pacific Humpback Whale stock.

We will raise awareness regarding whale watching practices and humpback whale behavior by hosting and facilitating workshops and training sessions geared toward boat operators, fishermen, tourist-oriented business owners, residents and visitors. These efforts will be led by early career and established scientists and educators from Mexico and the United States. A number of marine mammalogists and marine biology educators will spend short periods of time on the study with us throughout the season to participate in our outreach efforts, provide expertise and support to our research efforts, and strengthen the scientific community's understanding of marine mammals in the state of Guerrero as they relate to the larger stocks.

Website

For more information about the Whales of Guerrero Research Project, please visit:

Our project website at: <http://www.whalesinmexico.com>
and on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/whalesinmexico>

Volunteer Intern Positions

The WGRP is in the process of selecting volunteer interns for our Winter 2016 internship program. A minimum of 10 weeks of participation is required during 4 January - 20 March. **Applications are due by September 1st.** Please note that we are only seeking 4-6 interns this session and that we receive many more applications than we have openings.

Successful candidates will participate in the following research projects:

1) **Humpback whale field monitoring and photo-identification.** This study will continue monitoring the migratory community of humpback whales in Barra de Potosi, Zihuatanejo, Ixtapa and the surrounding waters. Duties in the field will consist of assisting with boat-based photographic identification surveys for humpback whales five days per week, six hours per day. Behavioral, location, individual, and environmental data will be recorded for each marine mammal group. Interns can expect to rotate between land-based field studies and on-water studies for the duration of the season and spend an average of 30% of their field data collection time on-land (in a lighthouse) and 70% on-water (in a 6-meter fishing panga).

2) **Data organization and analysis.** In addition to field duties, intern responsibilities will include office-based photo-identification of humpback whales and rough-toothed dolphin fins, computer data entry, video logging, fluke identification catalog maintenance, equipment repair, upkeep and maintenance and other duties. In addition to spending 3-4 days per week on water, interns should be prepared to spend an average of 1-2 days per week organizing, matching and

maintaining the fluke and fin identification catalogs, importing and compressing recorded sound, maintaining and repairing equipment and attending to other field duties as needed.

3) Safe boat operation workshops and community events. Interns will be expected to serve as continuous ambassadors for the project and be available to field questions on humpback whale behavior and biology whenever they are in the public. In addition, they will be expected to serve as educators and naturalists to project supporters and local guides who join us on the boat to work with us as citizen scientists on our project. Interns will also be expected to participate in and conduct humpback whale and marine mammal workshops in schools, libraries, hotels and other venues, as needed, a minimum of one time per week.

Interns should expect to spend about 60% of their time in the field (a minimum of five days per week, at least 6 hours per day), and about 40% of their time working with data, performing equipment maintenance and participating in community outreach and education efforts.

There is no compensation for these internship positions. However, the project will provide for living accommodations (homestays with local hosts in the village) during the time of the internship, and a \$250 travel stipend will be provided to support transportation to and from the region. Interns must cover the expense of their own food, local transportation, internet, telephone and miscellaneous personal expenses during the course of their internship.

Intern Qualifications

Applicants will ideally have the following qualifications:

- * Minimum of 24 years of age and engaged in or recently completed graduate studies or comparable marine biology field experience
- * A demonstrated commitment to and passion for marine mammals, education and community outreach and the development of responsible marine ecotourism
- * Bilingual (Spanish 90-100%/English 75-100%)
- * Proven ability to work within a range of cultures including: rural Mexican fishing village culture, North American tourists and foreign residents and educated Mexican bureaucrats
- * A background or degree in Biology, Marine Biology, Ecology, Zoology or a related field or comparable experience
- * Basic computer proficiency in Microsoft Office programs (especially Excel)
- * Knowledge of Lightroom and Mysticetus are a plus; photo and video editing skills also a plus
- * Proficient photo ID skills with a DSLR camera
- * Some field research experience
- * Must be able to swim
- * Not prone to seasickness
- * Enthusiasm and desire to learn a variety of field and lab based research methods

- * Demonstrated teamwork, rigor, strong organizational and problem solving skills, attention to detail, stamina, self-motivated
- * Independence, as in able to perform operations without supervision and ability to anticipate a problem and formulate a solution on one's own and the ability to work independently
- * A willingness to spend a minimum of 10-12 weeks working full-time (5-6 days/week) as a volunteer with our program.
- * Flexible and resourceful; adaptable to changes in study plans, cultural sensitivity

Intern Application Instructions

To apply for a Whales of Guerrero Research Project internship, interested persons should complete and provide to WGRP the following application materials:

1. Your name, birthdate, gender, permanent mailing address, phone number, e-mail address, the college or university you are currently attending or most recently attended, your year of study at the time of the internship, your major field of study, the highest degree you have received, the year you expect to graduate, other colleges or universities you have attended and the dates you are available to participate in the internship.
2. A one- to two-page **Statement of Interest** that describes: a) your interests in the program(s) you choose and your career goals, b) your reasons for applying for a WGRP internship, and c) why you should be selected for a WGRP internship. (This can be sent as a Word document or a PDF.)
3. An unofficial copy of your most recent college transcript that lists all college-level courses you have taken to-date and the grades you have received. Both unofficial and official copies are accepted. If your school's grading scale differs from the 4.0 scale, please include an explanation of that scale. (Sent as a PDF file, saved from your school's website as a jpg or png image or an html file, copy-and-pasted into a Word document.)
4. Two letters of recommendation from individuals capable of commenting on your research skills and qualifications.
5. A resume or curriculum vitae describing any relevant jobs, internships, volunteer work, scholarships and/or other activities that you have held or participated in and other skills or accomplishments that you wish to identify. (This can be sent as a Word document or PDF file.)
6. Send an email to WGRP Project Director (Katherina Audley, k@kpetunia.com) stating your name, contact information, exact dates and duration of availability, where you learned about the internship opportunity (e.g., SOMEMMA, MarMam, Facebook (and if so which page), Whalefish, colleague, advisor, etc.), and that you have provided all application materials to us, as detailed above.

All applications will be reviewed; those received by the application deadline of September 1st will be given first priority. Successful applications will be contacted by November 1, 2015.