

Whales of Guerrero Season 10 Update

How were the whales this year? What's new?

We collected early season data on Guerrero whales for the first time in 2022-2023. (We had collected data from January–mid-March from 2014-2022.) It was a lucky fluke to capture many, many flukes in December as the **whales arrived earlier in Guerrero** than anyone could ever remember having seen.

We also hopped aboard over 50 whale watch cruises and collected both dedicated scientific and opportunistic data while conducting real-time whale watch practice and training with our network of 75 captains. Now we're hard at work sorting tails out from the 23,000 photos shot this season. We're estimating **we will soon have at least 100 new (to us) flukes** to contribute to the global humpback whale catalog.



Our science has changed the global picture and understanding of humpback whales in the North Pacific. New laws and regulations have been and are continuing to be put into place off the West Coast of North America, Canada and Pacific Mexico to protect whales from ship strikes, fishing pot entanglements, acoustic disturbance and harassment as a direct result of our work. We have contributed to 6 peer reviewed science publications and at least as many reports, technical memorandums and scientific presentations since October 2022.

We experienced **more curious or friendly whales and more competitive groups than we ever have** during winter 2023. Thanks to the brilliant Happywhale ID fluke recognition program, **we IDed whales in real time**, and in our 10th year of field work, our **return rates of known individuals have begun to go up**. 80% of the humpback whales in the North Pacific have been individually identified. We still only recognize about 10% of Guerrero whales as repeat visitors, and those mostly the males who tend to show their flukes (mamas and newborns tend to keep a lower profile in the shallows as they nurse, nurture and grow). The more we learn, the more questions we have. It's a good problem. There is still so much more to discover!



How are the humans doing?

Thanks to your support and steep in-kind discounts from our whale guide community, **we brought 56 women and 80 kids out on their first whale watches ever**. Many had never been on a boat! The passengers return to land more powerful, alive and curious, and more connected to whales and nature forever. These experiences put the wind under all of our wings.

Watching a kid's face blossom in wonder at the sound of a whale song or sight of a blow is the best cure for hopelessness that we know.



Also, thanks to you, **our whale guide community is more empowered and united than it has ever been.** We didn't receive our safe whale watch flags this year, as the Mexican government has been through a big re-organization and they dropped the ball. If it hadn't been for 10 years of continuous community building it would have been a mess out there this season.



In the absence of government authorized whale watch flags, we created our own 'certified captain' identity and partnered with captains and communities to encourage visitors to go whale watching with trained captains who put whales' well-being first.

Again, thanks to your support, we facilitated in person gatherings every few weeks, maintained unity and addressed problems as they arose via the Whatsapp group, and wrapped the season without any accidents or major upsets with an inspiring and motivational end of season ceremony.



Now, more than ever, empowered communities are the key to keeping whales and people safe.

In 2023-2024, our guide community wants to launch 3 programs to protect whales & people:

- 1.) Build a guide-driven, on-water safe whale watch monitoring program
- 2.) Learn how to help entangled whales
- 3.) Create a marine mammal stranding response network

Endangered Community Identities

There's been a development boom in our region since COVID-19; nationals and foreigners are seeking slices of country heaven. **The village of Barra de Potosi is worried about losing their identity and interconnectedness, and ultimately, their place.**

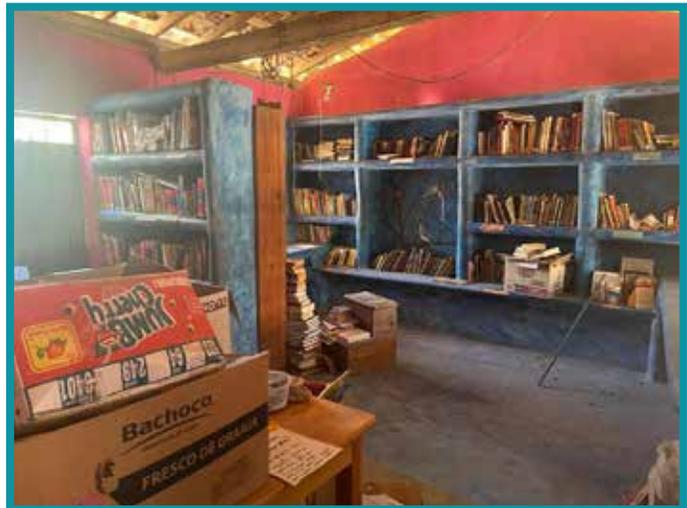
We helped to **keep community identity and engagement strong through weekly kids nature club meetups** (36 in the city of Zihuatanejo and 41 in Barra de Potosi) and continue to follow the communities' leads in supporting and facilitating environmentally-nurturing community-led programs and activities. We also introduced 1361 kids (in 13 schools in 6 cities and towns along a 75-mile stretch of coastline) to whales and our region's natural wonders.



The possibility for a **healthy, connected future shines bright in the walking tour guides, cooking teachers, whale watch guides and nature club kids.**

We held **weekly meetings and ongoing check-ins with the budding community leaders** to support their growth as ecotourism professionals, planners, administrators, communicators, organizers and more. We also completed several beach clean ups and brought the neglected village library up to a temporarily safe standard in order to run workshops and lend books out of there. **Our committed local conservation leaders are ready to lead the way and make it happen.**

The **most requested community building and support program is the restoration and buildout of a community learning and meeting center.** And so, in 2023-2024, we will help the community to achieve their vision by working hand-in-hand with the community to plan, design and fundraise to build a low-cost, ecologically friendly meeting center and improved learning center where people can connect, learn and thrive.



Whales of Guerrero on the road

The Whales of Guerrero team attended the Mexican Marine Mammal Science (SOMEMMA) conference in Colima in early May 2023 and **presented 10 years of whale science in Guerrero** to Latin American marine mammal scientists and students.

Also, as the 2021-2023 Vocalia Norteamerica to SOMEMMA, WoG Founder, Katherina Audley reported on how she has served as **bridge and spotlighter for Mexican marine mammal science in North America and beyond**. (She was unanimously and enthusiastically voted in to continue serving in the role from 2023-2025.) As a member of the SOMEMMA Whale Watch Committee, Whales of Guerrero team members are also **developing strategy and updating federal whale watch regulations and laws that will improve engagement and whale protection in Mexico**.

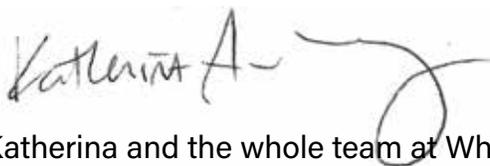


Oceanic Society is sponsoring Whales of Guerrero to **bring Whales of Guerrero's community-informed and -led approach to Kenya** this summer for a learning exchange with colleagues in Watamu, where community-based whale watching is nascent and marine mammal scientific discoveries are just beginning.

Whales of Guerrero is also contributing to a new IMO-led, **multi-national initiative designed slow down ship traffic and make shipping lanes more safe for whales throughout the entire Northeastern Pacific**.

THANK YOU, for helping us to connect people with nature through whales in Guerrero and around the world, friends. YOU are a big reason that all of this is possible.

Wishing you well and wishing you whales!



Katherina and the whole team at Whales of Guerrero

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The Whales of Guerrero 2022-2023 Season was supported by:

- The communities of Barra de Potosí, Zihuatanejo and Ixtapa
- The municipal governments of Zihuatanejo and Petatlan
- Amber Group
- Happywhale
- NOAA / Cascadia Research Collective
- LUSH Foundation
- Mijenta Tequila
- Finpin Shop
- Hundreds of individual supporters

Winter/Spring 2023 WoG publications:

Curtis, K., Calambokidis, J., Audley, K., et al. (2022). Abundance of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) wintering in Central America and southern Mexico from a one-dimensional spatial capture-recapture model. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SWFSC-661. <https://doi.org/10.25923/9cq1-rx80>

Martínez, Loustalot, P., Audley, K., Cheeseman, T., De Weerd, J., Frisch-Jordán, A., Guzón, O., Olio, M., Ortega-Ortiz, C., Ransome, N., Villegas-Zurita, f., et al. (2022). Towards the definition of the humpback whale population units along the Mexican and Central American coasts in the Pacific Ocean. *Marine Mammal Science*. DOI: 10.1111/mms.12980. United States.

McMillan, C., Ford, J., Cheeseman, T., Calambokidis, J., Audley, K. et al. (2023). Spatial patterns in the migratory destinations of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) encountered in Canadian Pacific waters, based on photo-identification data and ocean basin-wide collaboration. *Canadian Technical Report of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, 1488-5379; 3519. Fisheries and Oceans. Canada

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