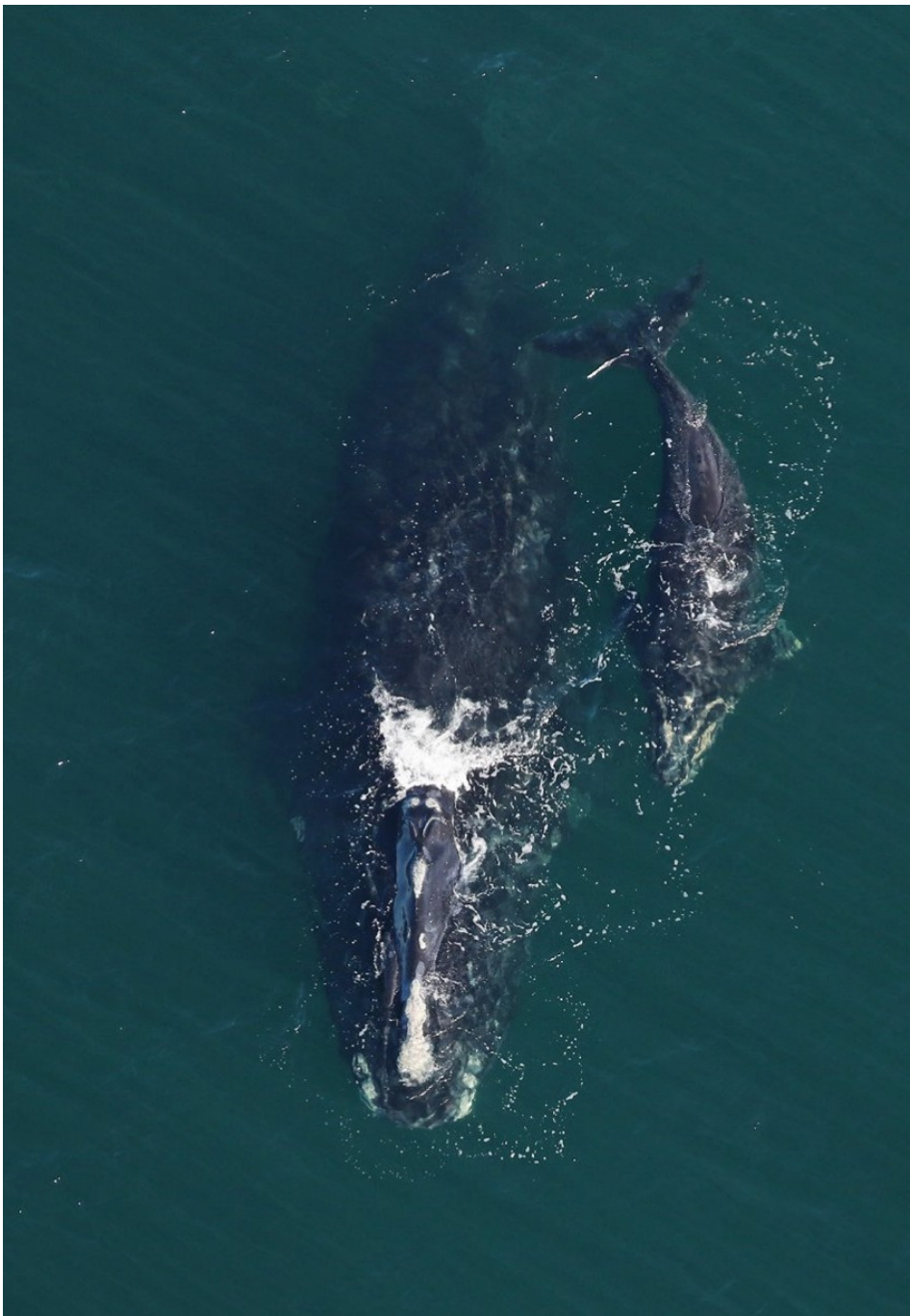


Spyhopper

ACS NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2021



SIGNS OF HOPE

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear ACS Members,

All of us entered this New Year with renewed prospects and a sense of optimism, after a long difficult year of this global pandemic. We're not out the woods, but things are looking up.

As I write this, I read about a new female calf born in the Southern Resident killer whale community, and another endangered North Atlantic right whale calf spotted on the other side of our country. Are these signs of hope? Are better days ahead?

1

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

3

CONFERENCE REPORT

7

CHAPTER REPORTS



A Pacific white-sided dolphin by Eric Austin Yee.

STAFFBOX EDITORIAL POD

Diane Glim
Jayne Vanderhagen
Uko Gorter, Illustrations
Rose Freidin, Graphic Designer

ACS NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Uko Gorter, President
Diane Glim, Secretary
Ric Matthews, Treasurer
Sabena Siddiqui, Student Coalition
Shelby Kasberger
Joy Primrose
Kelsey Stone
Jayne Vanderhagen
Bob Wilson

Read more about our
Chapters and Board Members
at acsonline.org

Letter cont.

Our organization too had to adjust and navigate these troubled times. As we had to cancel our in-person conference, planned for last November, we convened our first ACS Virtual Conference on January 30. You can read about this immensely successful event by our invited guest writer, Megan McGrath, in this newsletter.

With increasing vaccinations, we all hope that the American Cetacean Society and all its Chapters and Student Coalition groups will soon again resume their monthly events and conduct educational outreach in their communities.

In the meantime, we will forge ahead and continue to address the conservation needs of cetaceans worldwide in any way we can.

ON THE COVER

Left: Right whale Catalog #2413 'Nauset' and calf sighted approximately 13-nautical miles off Sapelo Island, Georgia on December 28, 2020. Photo by Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute, NOAA permit #20556-01.
Right: A Pacific white-sided dolphin by Eric Austin Yee.

On behalf of all of us at the American Cetacean Society, I want to thank all of you for your continued support of our organization, its chapters, and wonderful students.

We hope we meet again in-person and share our passion for whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

Onwards,

Uko Gorter

ERRATUM

Caption for the front cover (top image) of our December 2020 issue, misidentified as Pacific white-sided dolphins. They are common dolphins.



Michelle Fournet's presentation on *Humpback Whale Communication and the "Anthropause."*

WHALE SCIENCE HEARD ROUND THE WORLD

How this year's ACS conference went online—and unexpectedly worldwide

By Megan McGrath

If you've had the good fortune of attending an American Cetacean Society conference in person, you know that they're festive affairs. The 2018 conference in Newport Beach, for example, was a breezy oceanside event that, despite being a work meeting, somehow had the air of a weekend getaway. Cetacean science students, naturalists, and enthusiasts got the rare chance to rub shoulders with researchers over sun-drenched buffet lunches and a private whale watch. The 2020 conference was set to be a repeat experience—but alas, you know the story. The COVID-19 pandemic is still raging, and all of us are making the best of a bleak year.

Cut to this year's conference, which was rescheduled to January of 2021. In an interview, ACS President Uko Gorter detailed how the organization's board converted the event into something that could happen entirely online. The program was condensed into a single day, and made, for the first time, free to anyone who wanted to attend. "We decided not to charge because of the pandemic," said Gorter. "I mean, everybody's suffering financially."

These decisions were simply an attempt to make the best of a bad situation. But they resulted in something ACS had never designed before: A day of cetacean science programming that was accessible

to viewers from around the world. "I didn't realize how many people globally would tune in," the president remarked. "This surprised me actually. We're still digesting all of it." In the wake of the conference Gorter—who is based in the Seattle area—quickly received thank-you notes from cetacean enthusiasts as far away as Greece and Turkey, who said they were grateful to participate in an event they never would have been able to attend in person. Even on the day of the conference, it became clear that people had tuned in from all over the world as participants in the chat shared that they were logged in from Brazil, Bangladesh, and Iran; all in all,



ACS Conference Report cont.

registrants spanned 70 countries. So while it felt, in some ways, like a lonelier event, this was in fact an ACS conference with more successfully accessible global engagement than ever before.

In other words, the global nature of the audience for this conference may have, for the first time, matched the inherently global nature of the science being presented. Cetacean science is always global in scale—when you are studying animals that travel hundreds of miles in a stretch, borders tend to become absurd, and the entire ocean can become your research area. This year's conference brought reports of discoveries and conservation work from eastern Canada, Alaska, both peninsular and Bornean Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, and West Africa.

Almost every one of the seven talks given by researchers involved integrating work from around the world. For instance, the author Erich Hoyt, perhaps best known for his classic book on orca biology, has



Top: Screenshot from Michelle Fournet's presentation.

Bottom: Screenshot from Erich Hoyt's presentation, *Allocating Ocean Spaces*.

turned his attentions to the research and establishment of Important Marine Mammal Areas or IMMAs via his work with the Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force. IMMAs are evidence-driven designations of marine regions that may hold especially critical importance for

marine mammals, and Hoyt informed us that since the project began in 2016 about a third of the world's oceans have been surveyed. Through this work, 15,600,000 square kilometers of ocean—a combined area slightly smaller than the landmass of Russia—have been designated as IMMAs.

ACS Conference Report cont.

Other researchers presented work involving collaboration between worldwide stakeholders. Gianna Minton gave an overview of the diverse research and conservation collaborations she has spearheaded across three different regions—from work on the uniquely non-migratory humpback whales of the Arabian Sea, to research off Bornean Malaysia, to efforts to study the critically endangered West African species of humpback dolphins. Peter Corkeron detailed efforts to document catastrophic declines in the population of North Atlantic right whales, in part using comparisons with their counterparts in the Southern oceans. Paleontologist Hans Thewissen brought viewers deep into geologic past with an overview of what we know about cetaceans' legged ancestors—some of which were so successful in their day that their fossils have been found worldwide. Lori Marino, president of the Whale Sanctuary Project, introduced the newly-chosen site in Nova Scotia for their unprecedented plan to build a seaside sanctuary for captive orcas and belugas, which she hopes will serve as a model for organizations worldwide that wish to provide cetaceans in aquaria with the most humane circumstances possible. And researcher Louisa Ponnampalam told the story of her tireless work to establish cetacean research from the ground up—and with minimal funding—in Malaysia, despite skepticism from local stakeholders that whales and dolphins even existed in their region. Ponnampalam's inspiring talk transported viewers to a place where most of us will never be able to go, to learn about the extraordinary diversity of cetaceans that do indeed make their home in Malaysia. The online conference format was not without its difficulties. Even in person, audiovisual interfacing issues are practically guaranteed at conferences—but online, these issues become especially disruptive. This was most evident during Michelle Fournet's discussion of her work on humpback



Top: Screenshot from J.G.M. 'Hans' Thewissen's *From Land to Water: The Walking Whales*.

ACS Conference Report cont.

whale acoustics in Alaska. Fournet's work is viscerally fascinating; this year she sought to explain how call patterns changed during the near-cessation of ship noise due to COVID-19. Furthermore, she is an eternal favorite at conferences both because her presentation style is simple and comprehensive, and because she typically deals with any AVI failure by capably imitating the whale calls herself—to the universal delight of audiences. But an unfortunately-timed internet outage cut Fournet's talk this year short—despite, in Gorter's words, her “valiant” effort to make the best of a tricky situation. Luckily, Fournet was able to re-record her talk in its entirety, and it is now posted on the ACS YouTube channel.

So does this mark a new era of online events for ACS and organizations like it? Uko Gorter thinks it's too soon to tell. “I still favor in-person conferences,” the ACS president said. “It's lovely to have that sort of human contact.” This, along with technological obstacles, potential language barriers, and the difficulties of planning a conference while negotiating time differences around the world were daunting.

Still, besides the somewhat unexpected global reach of the conference, the online format had its advantages—namely, an extraordinary reduction in cost to ACS. Speakers were no longer required to travel to California to deliver their talks. “The in-person conference is impossible [to make free] because of the expense,” said Gorter,

but the online format enabled ACS to offer this year's conference free of charge.

“I don't know what the future's going to be!” Gorter concluded. “I think there's going to be long-term changes that we'll see well after the pandemic. And there may be other pandemics in the future. So [the online format] may be something for people to say, ‘We have a tool to do this.’”

**CLICK HERE TO VIEW
THE CONFERENCE ON OUR
ACS YOUTUBE CHANNEL**

youtube.com/channel/UCJ_4GEquS-jCQ6JGiKCo2w



Peter Corkeron's presentation, *Where are we with North Atlantic Right Whales?*

CHAPTER REPORTS



IMAGES BY ALISA SCHULMAN-JANIGER

LOS ANGELES

CHAPTER REPORT

*Compiled by Louisa Beck,
Chapter President*

The Cabrillo/ACS-LA Whalewatch Program has been continuing with virtual meetings every Tuesday at 7pm and will continue through March. Those attending seem to enjoy the meetings and exceptional speakers so much that many naturalists come early and stay late. This season, in lieu of an exam, which the veterans have taken before, they are being tasked with creating a “Graduation Project”. The project is up to their imagination and helps keep the naturalists engaged allowing their creativity to continue to flow (pun intended).

Due to Covid-19, the ACS/LA Gray Whale Census and Behavior Project has been cancelled this season. We are hopeful that we will begin next season on December 1, 2021.

We remain patient and hope to be back with our monthly meetings soon, back to some kind of normal in our everyday lives and back on the water to look for whales!



Top: Fluking northbound gray whale with distinctive white patches, part of courting trio; back side Santa Catalina Island, 2/28/21. Bottom: Short-beaked common dolphin leaping in the Santa Catalina Channel on 2/28/21.



*Humpback whale in Monterey Bay
taken from Discovery Whale Watch.*

ERIC AUSTIN YEE

Monterey Bay

CHAPTER REPORT

*Compiled by Brian Phan,
Chapter President*

In January, we were able to virtually participate in the Annual Whalefest Monterey by making a quick video about ACS Monterey Bay. This year's Annual Whalefest Monterey was live streamed on YouTube and on a local TV station.

With current limitations on in-person meetings, we are still able to continue to meet through Zoom.

In January, we had a wonderful presentation with Dr. Caroline Casey and her research with elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Park. She described her findings on male elephant seal vocalizations and their hierarchy during mating seasons. She also explained how she is currently researching these elephant seals during covid without any other human disturbances, due to part of the park being closed.

In February, we had the pleasure of having Dr. Robert W. Boessenecker again. Last time he spoke to our chapter was 10 years ago. He is currently a Research Associate and Adjunct Instructor at College of Charleston in South Carolina. He spoke to us about his previous research looking at marine vertebrate fossils from the Miocene and Pliocene in Central California. He was able to connect us with prehistoric whales and other species through their fossils that he discovered here in Central California.

In March, our presenter, Dr. Diane Gendron will talk about blue and fin whales of the Gulf of California. She has spent time there watching and observing these large animals feed and give birth. During her expeditions, she has been able to work on many different research topics from migrations to marine contaminations of these large cetaceans.



Fin whale, close to shore off Dana Point, on 2/28/21, by Alisa Schulman-Janiger.

Orange County

CHAPTER REPORT

*Compiled by Daryth Morrissey,
Chapter President*

The Orange County Chapter of ACS continues to be on hiatus due to the pandemic. We “whaley” miss “sealing” our members. It is with sad news to also report Oceanquest’s building where we held our monthly Lecture meetings has been sold. We hope to find a new space to hold meetings when life returns to normal again.

Naturalists have been going out on boats out of Newport and Dana Point. Gray whales, Common Dolphin, Pacific white-sided dolphins, False killer whales, and Fin whales have been sighted. Our Common dolphin stampedes and mugging humpback encounters have made local and national news.

Special “spout” out to Dana Point who was also in the news! Congratulations on becoming the First Whale Heritage Site in the United States. Excerpts from the *Los Angeles Times* Article:

By Mary Forgione
Assistant Travel Editor

Dana Point on Wednesday became the first Whale Heritage Site in the U.S., a distinction it shares with Hervey Bay in Australia, the Bluff in South Africa and newly named Tenerife-La Gomera Marine Area in Spain. The designation acknowledges areas known for having cultural ties and respectful interactions with whales and dolphins.

Ben Williamson, programs director of World Animal Protection U.S., explained that sites are selected for other reasons. “It’s all about the heritage, the culture, the education

and conservation sustainability,” he said. His global nonprofit organization partners with the World Ocean Alliance in hopes of creating “a world where cetaceans only live in the wild, where they live in harmony with people.”



Oregon

CHAPTER REPORT

*Submitted by Joy Primrose,
Chapter President*

Happy New Year! We welcomed 2021 by attending the virtual American Cetacean Society Conference on January 30.

Our Speaker Series resumed on February 20. Charlie Plybon, Oregon Policy Manager for Surfrider Foundation and serves on the Governor’s Ocean Policy Advisory Council presented *Oregon’s Marine Reserves: Past, Present, Future*. Designated in 2012 by the legislature, Oregon’s five marine reserve sites are special areas in the ocean dedicated to conserve marine habitats and biodiversity and serve as a living laboratory for scientific research. We

learned about how these areas were first created by Oregonians, what we are learning and the assessment process for the Marine Reserves Program. The first assessment report is due to the legislature in 2023.

This excellent presentation led into our March Speaker Series Meeting, *Citizen Science & You*. An update on the ACS Oregon chapter citizen science project, *Whales & Marine Reserves: Education and Awareness* with results from 2016 to present was presented along with volunteer training for the project. The project had to be modified for 2020 due to the pandemic and will likely continue in the modified format for 2021. Information on two other additional citizen science opportunities were provided.

Our Speaker Series meetings will continue on Zoom until further notice.

Puget Sound

CHAPTER REPORT

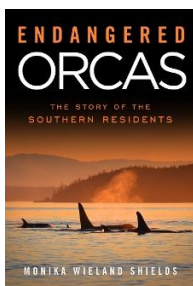
*Compiled by Uko Gorter,
President*

Our little ACS Chapter in Seattle has been dormant during this past year. Our trusted venue in Seattle closed during much of this period. The Seattle area was actually ground zero of the initial COVID-19 outbreak in our country. However, we feel optimistic that we will resume our monthly lectures later this year. Thank you for your patience with us. Stay tuned!



Top: Spyhopping northbound gray whale, part of courting trio; back side Santa Catalina Island. Bottom: Short-beaked common dolphin leaping the Santa Catalina Channel.

IMAGES BY ALISA SCHULMAN-JANIGER



Top: Iceberg image by Deneb Karentz.
Bottom Images provided by
Monika Wieland Shields.

San Diego

CHAPTER REPORT

Compiled by Leigh Anne Gibbons,
Chapter President

In December 2020, Monika Wieland Shields presented *Endangered Orcas: The Story of the Southern Residents*.

Monika Wieland Shields, co-founder and director of the non-profit Orca Behavior Institute, conducts non-invasive behavioral and acoustic research on orcas in the Salish Sea. Shields has been studying, photographing, and sharing stories about Southern Resident killer whales since 2000. Her presentation focused on the fact that although these whales are one of the most watched and studied whales in the world, they continue to struggle for survival in the waters of Washington state and British Columbia.

In February 2021, Daneb Karentz presented *Antarctica*.

Daneb Karentz, a Biology and Environmental Science professor at the University of San Francisco, is a marine biologist with expertise in plankton ecology, and has over 30 years of field experience in Antarctica. She is co-director of the U.S. National Science Foundation International Training Program in Antarctic Biology; the U.S. delegate to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research; and serves as a science advisor to the U.S. Department of State for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings.

Daneb's presentation focused on the importance of studying, governing, and

San Diego cont.

environmental protection of Antarctica. Antarctica is described as the coldest, driest, and windiest continent- and has an extreme environment home to a large species diversity with no native peoples, permanent human residents, or local economy.

In March 2021, Ricky Rebolledo presents *Scientific Snapshot - A Second Chance for Mexico's Marine Wildlife*.

Centro de Rescate, in La Paz, Baja California Sur, is a rescue center devoted to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of stranded, injured, sick and entangled marine wildlife. This uniquely situated



Images provided by Deneb Karentz.





San Diego cont.

program aids both the Pacific coast of Baja California and the Gulf of California, and all of Mexico. The majority of animals brought to the rehabilitation center are California sea lions, seals, endangered Guadalupe fur seals, and sea turtles, and the occasional dolphin.

Ricky Rebolledo, the Director of Operations for Centro de Rescate, is a native of Mexico who has worked as a marine mammal specialist and conservation officer for more than 25 years, including VaquitaCPR; RABEN, the Mexican whale disentanglement network; and the global disentanglement network for large cetaceans. Ricky also works with local and international organizations that include researchers, fishermen, tour operators and citizen scientists devoted to conserve and protect marine wildlife.

Whale Watching Tours

We are proud to announce we have three whale watching tour companies that have offered ACS member discounts: Legacy Whale Watch; Oceanside Adventures and San Diego Whale Watch. For further information, go to acssandiego.org.

Southbound juvenile gray whale, classic heart-shaped blow; head with orange lice, white barnacles, Palos Verdes on 1/1/21.

San Diego Chapter Board of Directors

Leigh Anne Gibbons
President

Jayne Vanderhagen
Immediate-Past President and Secretary

Ric Matthews
Treasurer

George Liddle
Membership Chair

Sarah Dabydeen
Programs Chair

Cary Strand
Community Outreach Chair

Jessie Richter
Social Media Chair

Jennifer Halbritter
Social Media Chair



San Francisco Bay

CHAPTER REPORT

Compiled by Gail Koza

The San Francisco Bay Chapter wishes our community well!

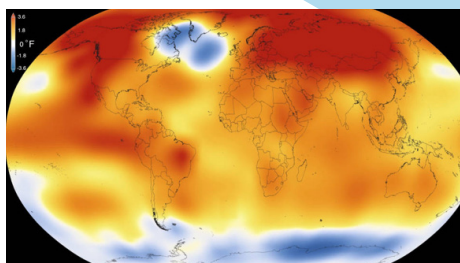
MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES WEBINARS

The San Francisco Bay chapter enjoys great community participation in our Speaker Series webinars, where scientists, photographers, and ocean experts offer insights into important topics related to cetaceans and other marine species. Learn more at acs-sfbay.org/events or on our Facebook page.

What About Climate Change and the Impact on Ocean Life?

January 26

Three esteemed scientists joined us for an enlightening panel discussion about climate change and its impacts and implications for marine mammals and the ocean ecosystems they depend upon. We explored a range of topics including impact on marine mammals and ocean habitats, evidence of resiliency among marine mammals, and how large whales can help to mitigate rising carbon dioxide levels. We discussed top threats to address so whales can play their important roles on our planet, actions that we all can take to help reduce our carbon footprints, and more. Learn more and watch the webinar here: bit.ly/ClimateLearnMore.



Top: Corky the Northern resident orca. Bottom Left: 2015 NASA Record Shattering Global Warm Temperatures. Bottom Right: An endangered vaquita in the Sea of Cortez.



TOM JEFFERSON

Dr. Barbara Taylor Vanishing Vaquitas: Lessons From a Humble Porpoise February 23

Dr. Barbara Taylor delivered a thought-provoking presentation about what we can learn from the plight of the vaquita porpoise. Only a handful of Mexico's desert porpoise remains, and their habitat is a war zone controlled by illegal wildlife poachers. While there is still some hope, most lessons learned from this toxic situation warn us about the consequences of our unsustainable behavior. Vaquitas are collateral damage in a global struggle to save coastal and riverine cetaceans from gillnets. Learn more and watch the webinar here: bit.ly/vaquitalearnmore.

Michael Reppy The Northern Resident Orcas and Bringing Corky Home March 23

Our community gathered to learn from Michael Reppy about the world of the Northern resident orcas, and the effort to

have Corky released from captivity and brought to a whale sanctuary in Double Bay, British Columbia so she can retire in her home waters and reconnect with her family. Learn more and watch the webinar here: bit.ly/CorkyLearnMore.

CHAPTER BLOG

To offer insights into the world of whales, dolphins, and porpoises in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond, we're sharing monthly conversations with Izzy Szczepaniak through our blog at acs-sfbay.org/blog. Izzy Szczepaniak is a Marine Biologist, a member of our Chapter Board of Directors, and a Research Associate of The Marine Mammal Center and California Academy of Sciences.

In Conversation With Izzy: A New Year Begins With Positive News About North Atlantic Right Whales

In this inaugural 2021 installment, Board Member Susan Hopp sat down with Izzy to learn about recent news related to North Atlantic Right Whales. Read the blog here: bit.ly/IzzyJan2021.

Student Coalition

CHAPTER REPORTS

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY- CORPUS CHRISTI

*Compiled by Sabena Siddiqui,
Student Coalition Chair*

Even a pandemic won't stop our students from their work to engage their campus communities in marine conservation and science education. The ACS-Texas A&M University Corpus Christi group kicked off 2021 with more virtual events for their student members. The group welcomed graduate students from Texas A&M for a graduate school panel where speakers discussed their research and participated in a Q&A with student attendees about all things graduate school. Other virtual events included a presentation by ACS student alumni Jamie McWilliams from the Texas Sealife Center and Sarah Piwetz



from the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network. The group anticipates further virtual events with speakers such as professors, researchers and conservation professionals so that their students can have exposure to a myriad of career opportunities in their futures.

We are excited to announce that the ACS Student Coalition is growing, even in these uncertain times. ACS-University of Michigan will be holding their first meeting in March and a group is coming together at Oregon State University.

Stay tuned to learn more about how our tenacious students are continuing on in their quest for education and conservation no matter the circumstance!

Southbound gray whale fluking; many healed entanglement scars, on 1/24/21.



ALISA SCHULMAN-JANIGER