

ICELAND

PROGRESS REPORT ON MARINE MAMMALS IN 2013

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INTRODUCTION

The following reports on studies on marine mammals in Icelandic and adjacent waters in 2013. While most of the studies were conducted by the Marine Research Institute (MRI) and its various research partners, queries for information on research were sent to all offices or individuals known to have been involved in marine mammal research or data collection during the period. These include University of Iceland Research Center in Húsavík (RUCR), Húsavík Whale Museum (HWM), Fossilish Cetacean Research project (FCR), Innovation Centre, Iceland (ICI), Keilur, Institute for Experimental Pathology (KEP), the Institute of Natural History (INI), University of Iceland (UI) as well as data collection from private commercial platforms such as whaling and whale watching companies. The Icelandic Seal Center (ISC) has conducted seal research in Iceland since the year of 2008. The Icelandic Institute of Freshwater Fisheries (IFF) has one joint employee with ISC, who is also head of Seal Research department at ISC. ISC is currently cooperating with several institutions regarding seal research, such as Vör Marine Research Center at Breiðafjörður, BioFISH at Marine Biotechnology Science Hotel in Hagarðardalur, HÍlar University College, The University of Stockholm, Natural history museum of Sweden and Swedish University of Agricultural Science.

As in previous years research efforts on marine mammals at the MRI in 2013 were largely devoted to a comprehensive biological programme from the commercial catch of fin whales initiated in autumn 2006 and catches taken since (2009, 2010 and 2013 seasons). Further analysis of the previous NASS sightings surveys (Gunnarsson et al. 2013, Pika et al. 2013) and planning for the survey in 2015. Sightings data on all species and effort is routinely collected on board the Breiðafjörður station whaling vessels, and stored in a database at the MRI.

The MRI preserves all genetic samples available. Since 2012 skin samples for genetic analysis have been routinely collected from most marine mammals by-catch in the MRI fisheries surveys.

The INI is responsible for collection and preservation of museum specimens of marine mammals in Iceland. The INI archives mammal skeletons and bone remains discovered from the natural environment and archaeological material from middens. The archive includes about 200 specimens, mostly from walrus. Information on occurrences of Walrus found in Iceland has been collected over many years. Historical and recent. Cloning and preservation of a blue whale skeleton from a stranding event in 2010 is completed.

Information on strandings of whales found in Icelandic waters has been collected by the MRI over many years. This includes dead whales, ice-locked live animals and live animals driven ashore, historical and recent. Biological investigations of strandings is conducted on an opportunistic basis. The ISC members visit of saggart seals to the coast of Iceland by collecting information about such visits from the news or human resources (photos of live animals) or by receiving copies of stranded dead pups.