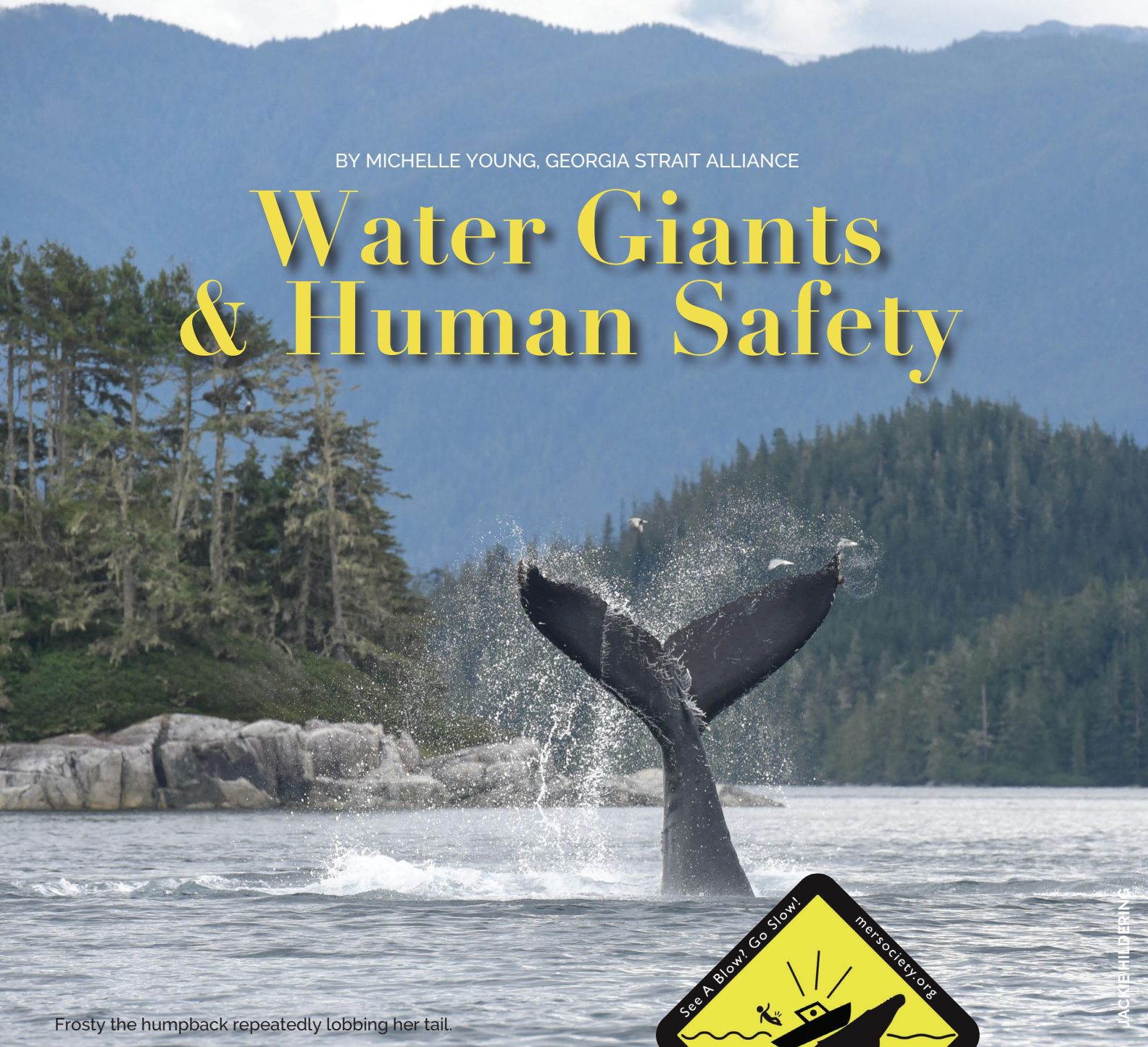


BY MICHELLE YOUNG, GEORGIA STRAIT ALLIANCE

Water Giants & Human Safety



Frosty the humpback repeatedly lobbing her tail.

SIGHTINGS OF HUMPBACK WHALES in the North Pacific are once again common in the waters off the coast of BC. “We have a second chance with these giants,” says humpback researcher Jackie Hildering of the Marine Education and Research Society (MERS), noting that humpbacks were once hunted almost to the point of extinction.

These magnificent whales are large, move through the water in unpredictable ways and sometimes surface without warning after long dives that can last more than 20 minutes. This makes them potentially very dangerous to recreational boaters.

Humpbacks can unexpectedly become acrobatic, suddenly breaching out of the water or slapping their long pectoral fins at the surface. It can also be difficult for boaters to know that humpbacks are “logging” or resting just below the surface since they may remain stationary, only exhaling every few minutes.

SEE A BLOW? GO SLOW!

- Be vigilant for blows and other indicators of whale presence such as aggregations of birds.
- Take extra precautions in areas where whales are known to frequent.
- Recognize and consider using the “Whale Warning Flag” to signal the presence of nearby whales to other watercraft.

For more information visit www.SeeABlowGoSlow.org



“Boaters need to know that humpbacks and other baleen whales are often oblivious of the proximity of boats as they don’t have the bio-sonar as orcas do,” says Hildering, emphasizing the unpredictability of humpbacks. “The fortunate return of the giants is a game-changer for boaters,” she says.

The good news is that it’s easy for boaters to reduce risks and make positive contributions to marine research and conservation initiatives. Recreational boaters can accomplish this by reducing the disturbance their boat causes and being aware that collisions, noise and entanglements are devastating to the well-being of whales. Disentanglement attempts are extremely dangerous and can cause further harm to an entangled whale and should only be undertaken by trained experts.

Collisions with Pacific Humpbacks, which are listed as being of “special concern” under Canada’s Species at Risk Act, can cause human injury or death, and material loss among boaters. Even large boats can be severely damaged by their sheer size.

It’s on us, whether we use motorized vessels, sailboats, kayaks, canoes, row-boats or paddle boards, to learn more about the behaviour of large whales and where they routinely rest or feed so we can reduce possible harm – for the whales and for water enthusiasts as well.

BOATERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE THESE VOLUNTARY MEASURES:

- Slow down to seven knots or less and stop fishing when within 1000 m (3,280 ft) of orcas.
- Turn off fish finders and echo sounders when not in use.
- Put engines in neutral (idle) and allow animals to pass if your vessel is unexpectedly not in compliance with the approach/distance regulations.

“Approximately 50 percent of humpbacks off the BC Coast have entanglement scarring, according to the preliminary results of a joint MERS-DFO study.”

LARGE WHALES ON B.C.’S SOUTH COAST

Humpbacks have grey-to-black colouring with some white on their underside. There are approximately 200-400 individuals in the Southern BC/Washington region. They measure 12 m (39 ft) to 17 m (56 ft).

Grey whales have a mottled grey colour with differing pigmentation. They measure 11 m (36 ft) to 12.5 m (41 ft). In addition to grey whales that migrate further north, there are approximately 100 individuals, designated as the Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation, which can be found in BC waters in the summer and fall.

IT’S THE LAW!

Before heading out on the water, ensure you’re aware of Canada’s Marine Mammal Regulations and further measures to protect whale populations. These include:

- Staying at least 200 m (about 650 ft) from all whales, dolphins, or porpoises if they are resting or with their calf. Additional measures to protect endangered whales have included staying at least 400 m (about 1300 ft) from orcas in southern BC coastal waters between Campbell River and just north of Ucluelet.
- Staying at least 100 m (328 ft) from all other whales and porpoises.
- Do not swim with, move or feed any marine mammal.
- Report entanglements and collisions to Fisheries and Oceans Canada. In BC, save this number in your phone: (800) 465-4336. It’s also helpful to report observed violations and harassment of marine mammals.

JACKIE HILDERING

Inukshuk the humpback breaching.



CANNERY & SMOKEHOUSE
NATURAL WOOD SMOKING & HAND PACKED CANNING



WE SHIP WORLD WIDE



SPORT FISH DROP OFF LOCATIONS

NANAIMO • CAMPBELL RIVER • PORT ALBERNI • VICTORIA
TOFINO • UCLUELET • DELTA • N. VANCOUVER

TOLL FREE: 1(866) 754-3191

www.stjeans.com