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Exploring and Disseminating New Tales about Whales

Erich HOYT

Why are we here today? It is because people are talking about whales as never before. Whales are in the news. Some say that whales are unique, intelligent, a special case. Some say whales are for watching. Some say whales are a tool to learn about the sea, that they have a key role to play in ocean conservation. Others say that whales are a product, a resource, to be used as we humans want them to be used. Still other people shrug and say ‘WHY are people talking about whales?’ What is the big deal?’

In recent years, whales have created controversy — or should I say that we humans have created controversy around whales? If whales have become ‘political animals’, in one sense of the word, we made them so. Through the practice of whaling and the protest of anti-whaling, they really became more like ‘political footballs’ as we say in English. Kicked around. Meanwhile whales, for their part, have ever been simply living their lives at sea — socializing, singing, swimming free, high profile indicators of the health of the marine environment, trying to make a living in the human-altered ocean ecosystems that are their only home.

Today, our knowledge of whales, the terms we use to speak about them, and consequently the type of discourse they engender, are changing. This is happening in Japan, as well as worldwide. Today, we will hear new stories about whales and dolphins, the so-called cetaceans.

There are a couple developments that put things into sharp focus:

- All over Japan, people are paying to watch cetaceans, nearly 200,000 people last year. Tomorrow, in this room, at the invitation of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), whale watch operators from around Japan, will join together with foreign whale watch operators and experts to talk about how to improve their business, to reach more people, to give a high quality experience, to help the whales.
- Worldwide, nearly 13 million people per year in 119 countries paid \$2.1 billion USD to watch cetaceans (O’Connor et al, 2009). With a 3.7 percent average annual rate of increase, whale watching is currently growing as fast as world tourism. Regionally, whale watching in Asia is the fastest growing in the world at 17.2 percent per year, largely driven by China and Japan. I will talk more about this tomorrow.

The first time that humans met whales is unrecorded, but it was probably when a whale became stranded on a beach. It was no doubt a strange gift from the sea. A fresh stranding was a source of food, oil, materials, supplies, including the keratinous, flexible baleen that had so many uses before the advent of plastic and other man-made materials.

One of the first recorded accounts of whales and dolphins comes from Aristotle, a pioneer marine biologist, among his many other talents. He knew that cetaceans were air-breathing mammals. In one passage he wrote that the fishermen could tell the dolphins apart from the nicks in their tails. His comments prefigure photo-ID — the

photographic identification of individual animals from markings that has proved to be a key tool for research. After Aristotle, whales and dolphins went back to being fish or worse, monsters of the deep. It took a further 2000 plus years for humans to advance much beyond the insights of Aristotle.

In the meantime, around 1000 AD, the Basque people figured out how to hunt the slow-moving right whales. There began a relentless period of commercialization of whales that had its ups and downs, moving from ocean to ocean, from country to country, from species to species, from feeding grounds to breeding grounds, until it reached its peak in the middle part of the last century in the Antarctic. Much has been written about the various eras of whaling. For a time, whales lit the lamps of the world, fed people, fueled world exploration, and produced great stores — Melville's *Moby-Dick* — but those days, those stories are long past.

In the 1960s, Roger Payne heard for the first time the song of the humpback whale. The record he made with Scott McVay went to the top of the charts. And then came the re-discovery of the distinctive markings of cetaceans, photographed by hand-held SLR cameras, proving Aristotle's claim that whales and dolphins could be distinguished individually by markings on their bodies. This, along with other more recent technological developments we will hear about today, has provided the key to learning about them as individuals, as social groups, mapping their migration patterns, discovering that they return to the same places, year after year, for breeding and feeding. And as we have drawn even closer, we have begun to glimpse the signs of culture, that older whales, usually mothers, are passing along dialects and songs to their progeny, as well as favourite hunting methods, for example, how, if you are a Patagonian orca, do you snatch a sea lion from the beach without getting stuck.

This symposium celebrates the fact that our knowledge about whales and dolphins has advanced considerably and our ideas are changing— among specialists who work in some way with whales, whether they be scientists, economists, international policy specialists, tourism ministries or artists — as well as with the general public.

We have here today an esteemed group of scientists who have worked on the frontiers of 'cetacean science.' They have spent months at a time on expeditions, drifted on boats in rough seas, to bring back fresh stories of how these animals live, what they do with their lives. They have also examined dead whales and dolphins on beaches, in nets and associated with fisheries. A good cetacean scientist is like a detective, gravitating toward whatever clues can be gleaned to assemble a picture of the whale or dolphin's life. Good scientists also listen to the sounds of the sea to find out where whales are, what they're doing, even what they are saying, although research is still very young in that department. Blue whales sing songs that rumble across ocean basins. They may not sound much like songs to us with their low monotonous tones, but presumably they are not boring to another blue whale. The fact that blue whales are capable of such prodigious sound production makes us wonder what they use it for.

I would like to talk about the role of those who work in international relations, who understand the political and the economic realities of our day. They work on the 'whales as political footballs' issue. They have been trying to understand why we humans continue the policy and practice of whaling, whether it's necessary or

desirable, whether it is a thing of the past or indeed an industry of the present and future. Whales have got caught, like by-catch, in the discourses over national sovereignty and tradition, which has led to antagonism and disagreements. But, rather than resort to the old arguments pro and con, we could think about how to move toward an exit strategy — a completely new way of thinking about whales. Meanwhile, we must ask from a commercial point of view: Would the business of whaling in the future ever be able to rival what whale watching has already become?

I would like to talk about the role of photography, art and literature in terms of opening up hearts and minds to new ideas about whales and dolphins. There is a pioneering tradition of Japanese photographers, artists and writers who have been exploring new tales about whales for several decades beginning with our distinguished moderator IWAMOTO-san. On one of my early 1990s visits to Kochi Prefecture, at a spot near where the pure Shimanto River flows into Tosa Bay I saw Bryde's whales and many dolphins and I met Namiyo KUBO who was painting a 70m long outdoor mural at the port in Kuroshio-cho. Her work captured the power of pods of whales bringing in the fish. For the fishermen in this town, the coming of the whales meant that the fish were here, too— cause for celebration.

I have watched whales all over Japan, and ventured out to the Kuroshio Current to see the river of life. But I was amazed to read the recent paper by Fujikura and his colleagues (Fujikura et al, 2010) who have reported that Japan may be the most biodiverse marine area in the world. Some 33,629 species, nearly 15 percent of the world's marine biodiversity, have been identified, and this represents only 30 percent of Japanese marine biodiversity with another 70 percent uncatalogued. It is appropriate that Japan hosted the 10th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) this past October in Nagoya. And this confers a responsibility to protect, to be a steward, for biodiversity.

In Europe, where I live, we are struggling to maintain the relicts of our whale and dolphin populations in an area with considerably reduced biological diversity and challenged ecosystems (Halpern et al, 2008). I look out on the North Sea where unregulated fishing has scraped the bottom and removed much of what remains in the water column. In the Mediterranean, we navigate perilously close to the edge of history, the edge of the future, a future with much reduced marine diversity. I think we can learn a lot about the future of the environment by studying the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean is busy and noisy. The Mediterranean has 30 percent of the world's ship traffic on 1 percent of the surface area. Remember whales and dolphins use sound to hunt and navigate and socialize. If they cannot hear, they cannot communicate with each other, and they can get hit by ships — life becomes the solitary pursuit of a noisy obstacle course. The Mediterranean countries host more tourists than anywhere else in the world. Its sewage and pollution loads are massive. Sperm whales, fin whales, Cuvier's beaked whales and various dolphins persist in this ancient sea but they won't for long if we don't work hard to improve their ocean environment. The dolphins of Aristotle and the ancient Greeks are already in steep decline; the 'common dolphin' is now uncommon. We may learn painful lessons here. But learn them we must.

Worldwide, as I speak, an estimated 300,000 cetaceans a year are still being killed in fishing gear, the majority accidentally (Read et al, 2006). I would like to ask a

question here: Do we perhaps now *know too much about* whales and dolphins to allow them to be killed like this? We need to *do* more. We need to think more about what we can actively do to help the ocean.

So we come here today not to dwell on the past or to retell old tales about whales, but mainly to share current and future tales: what marine mammal biologists can tell us about the lives and culture of whales; what political scientists and journalists can tell us about where the discourse on whales in politics and society is going; and also what concerns artists, photographers and novelists in their vivid images and explorations. We here at this symposium will tell these stories among ourselves, but throughout the day there will be one additional question that we will all be implicitly considering: How do we begin to share all these stories more widely with the public, so that these new tales about whales can enter and enrich the ‘mainstream narrative’, and also be *taken to heart* by ordinary society?

I would now like to introduce my friend and colleague IWAMATO Kyusoku-san as our moderator today. He is a manga artist, widely celebrated for his subtle and surreal images of birds, whales and people that have appeared in various delightful books which are among the most treasured volumes in my personal library. In 1988, he took the rather bold step of bringing 20 of his bird-watching and media/artist friends to Ogasawara to try to watch humpback whales. Since then he has gone whale watching all around Japan and I have had the huge pleasure to accompany him a few times. IWAMOTO-san will now say a few words before introducing our first panel on science.

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Abstract and biography in Japanese and English

エリック・ホイット

クジラをめぐる新しい物語の探求とその発信

最近、クジラのことをよく話題になっています。クジラに関する私たちの知識やクジラを語る言葉は変化し、それに伴い日本をはじめ世界中のクジラをめぐるディスカールの中身も様変わりしています。古代、アリストテレスがクジラとイルカを注意深く観察し、この生物の特性を見抜いていたにもかかわらず、私たちはその後長きに渡って鯨類を魚に分類し、漁業の観点から捉えてきました。こうした認識に変化が訪れたのはここ20-30年、私たちがようやく鯨類を社会性を備えた哺乳類として理解し、鯨類の海洋における生態学的役割やツーリズムと環境保護教育に対する潜在的価値を認識し始めたころからです。私たちに初めてクジラやイルカと触れ合う機会を与えてくれたのがホエールウォッチング（日本では年間約20万人、世界では1300万人が体験）であり、21世紀を生きる私たちのクジラに対する考え方を変えつつあります。しかし、クジラの真の価値をめぐるっては、矛盾する意見も根強く残っています。ここ数十年の間、まるで間違っただけに網に引っ掛かってしまった魚のように、クジラは、確執や対立を生む、国家主権や伝統にかかわるディスカールの中に、捉えられてきたのです。

今日私たちがここに集まったのは過去にこだわるのではなく、クジラをめぐる物語の現状と未来について意見を分かち合うためです。今日ここで語られるのは、海洋哺乳類を研究する生物学者が教えてくれるクジラの生態と文化、政治学者とジャーナリストが伝える政治と社会におくるクジラのディスカール、そしてアーティスト、写真家、作家がその生き生きとしたイメージと探求の中に表現しようとするもの、についての物語です。そして今日1日が終わるころ、私たちの心には新たな問いかけが生まれているでしょう。「ここで語られた物語を多くの人と分かち合い、このクジラをめぐる新しい物語が力強い『本流』となって、社会全体から真剣に受け止められるようになるために、私たちは何から始めればいいのか」という問いかけが。

エリック・ホイット氏は、クジラ・イルカ保護協会（WDCS）の研究員であるとともに、重要な生息地／海洋保護区プログラムで主導的な役割を担っています。また極東ロシア・オルカプロジェクトおよびカムチャッカ半島のロシア鯨類生息地プロジェクトの共同ディレクターを務めています。著書は18冊を数え、来日経験も豊富なホイット氏は、現在スコットランドのノースバーリック在住です。

Erich HOYT

EXPLORING AND DISSEMINATING NEW TALES ABOUT WHALES

People are talking about whales as never before. Our knowledge of whales, the terms we use to speak about them, and consequently the type of discourse they engender, are changing—in Japan, as well as worldwide. Despite early insights by Aristotle, who made accurate observations of whales and dolphins, throughout our history humans have largely considered them as fish and in terms of fisheries. That has changed in the last few decades as we have begun to learn more about their lives as social mammals, their ecological role in the sea, and their potential value for tourism and conservation education. Whale watching in Japan (nearly 200,000 people per year) and worldwide (13 million per year) has introduced people to whales and dolphins for the first time, and it is shaping the way people think about them in the 21st Century. Yet contradictory views about the true value of whales persist: in recent decades whales have got caught (like by-catch) in the discourses over national sovereignty and tradition, which has led to antagonism and disagreements.

We come here today not to dwell on the past, but to share current and future tales about whales: we will hear what marine mammal biologists can tell us about the lives and culture of whales; what political scientists and journalists can tell us about the discourse on whales in politics and society; and also what concerns artists, photographers and novelists in their vivid images and explorations. And throughout the day there will be one additional question that we will all be implicitly considering: How do we begin to share all these stories more widely with the public, so that these new tales about whales can enter and enrich the ‘mainstream narrative’, and also be *taken to heart* by ordinary society?

Erich Hoyt is a research fellow with WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and leads its Critical Habitat / Marine Protected Areas Programme. He is a member of the IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. He co-directs the Far East Russia Orca Project and the Russian Cetacean Habitat Project in Kamchatka and has written 18 books. A frequent visitor to Japan, he is based in North Berwick, Scotland.