JAX USWTR Survey Effort Update

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Aerial and vessel surveys continue on a monthly basis at the proposed Undersea Warfare Training Range (USWTR) off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida. As of 20 May 2010, a total of 296 tracklines have been surveyed since January 2009, 131 of which were flown since January 2010 (Table 2). Since commencing vessel surveys in July 2009, a total of 17 surveys have been conducted, with six occurring in 2010. Two High-frequency Acoustic Recording Packages (HARPs) were recovered and downloaded this January. Both units were refurbished and are currently deployed.

Table 2. USWTR JAX tracklines and total nm surveyed by month in 2010.

		Month					
	Month	**January**	**February**	**March**	**April**	**May**	**Total**
Aerial	Number of tracklines surveyed	46	30	20	25	10	131
	nm surveyed	2117	1375	910	1116	438	5956
Vessel	Number of tracklines surveyed	3	0	2	0	1	6
	nm surveyed	93	0	78	0	36	207

Right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) have been observed in or near the JAX USWTR survey area three times since starting surveys in 2009 (Table 3). On 20 March 2010, a single, large right whale was sighted at 10:20 at the western end of a trackline. The whale was observed for 27 minutes prior to the birth of a neonate. The neonate appeared at the surface after the adult had remained submerged, out of view, for several minutes. The aerial survey team continued observations for approximately 19 minutes before leaving the site and returning to land. At this point, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission aerial survey team moved in to continue documentation. Using photos taken by the two aerial survey teams, the New England Aquarium later confirmed the female whale as "Derecha," #2360 in the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog. The sighting of the birth is notable because it occurred outside existing critical right whale habitat, because of its proximity to the proposed USWTR site, and because it was only the second North Atlantic right whale birth observed (the other reported by Zani *et al*. *Aquatic Mammals* 2008 34(1): 21-24). The sighting is currently being prepared for publication. In addition to the witnessed birth, a lone male right whale (# 2303) was observed and photographed on 20 March at the western end of a trackline. On 2 April 2010, a right whale cow-calf pair was encountered during off-effort transit out to the range, approximately 2 nm from the western edge of the survey tracklines. The mother was identified as right whale #3360.

Table 3**.** North Atlantic right whale sightings during USTWR JAX surveys.

Date	Time	On/Off Effort	Latitude	Longitude	Number	Whale ID	Notes
20-Mar-10	10:20	On	30.047	80.697	2	2360 and calf	Observed birth
20-Mar-10	16:11	On	30.429	80.677	1	2303	
2-Apr-10	15:09	Off	30.366	80.728	2	3360 and calf	

Other cetacean species observed from 1 January through 20 May 2010 include sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*), bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), and Atlantic spotted dolphins (*Stenella frontalis*). All marine mammal sightings have been posted to the OBIS SEAMAP website and can be searched by species for sighting date and location.

(For more information, see RWN May 2009 and August 2009)

Right Whales in Rhode Island Sound: April 2010

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On Tuesday, 20 April 2010, a crew from the URI Dept. of Natural Resources Science doing an aerial survey for seabirds in Rhode Island Sound and Block Island Sound sighted six or seven North Atlantic right whales and one humpback during their survey. The NOAA Twin Otter was also flying in the vicinity, and the pilot of the URI survey passed on the information to the NOAA pilots.

According to initial reports through NOAA's Sighting Advisory System (SAS), the NOAA survey crew sighted 96 right whales that day in five separate aggregations—three in Rhode Island Sound, one more offshore over the inner shelf, and one at the entrance to Vineyard Sound. The largest group was the most offshore sighting of 40 whales about 12 nautical miles (nmi) south-southwest of Nomans Land, and 17 more whales were recorded about 12 nmi west of Nomans Land. An aggregation of 22 whales was observed about 15 nmi south of Sakonnet Point in eastern Rhode Island. Fifteen whales were seen about 8 nmi south of Brenton Point. A mother-calf pair was sighted about 2 nmi northwest of Gay Head (the western end of Martha's Vineyard)

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

An independent forum for right whale conservation and recovery,
published four times a year in February, May, August, and November

Volume 18 Number 2 ***May 2010***

A Report from the Calving Ground

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&
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A few months after the right whale calving season ends, as time passes, we forget about all the long hours, sleepless nights, and endless emails and focus on the outcome. The four-month-long season can encounter coordination and logistical difficulties, but summarizing the efforts of the aerial survey teams, biopsy teams, volunteer networks, and state and federal managers is also a challenge! This report describes the calving season by the (preliminary) numbers, and would not have been possible without the collaboration of all involved.

The South Carolina/Northern Georgia (SCGA) surveys were conducted by Wildlife Trust from 15 November 2009 through 15 April 2010. The three components of the Early Warning System (EWS) surveys were conducted 1 December 2009 through 31 March 2010 by Wildlife Trust for the Northern EWS, New England Aquarium for Central EWS, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for the Southern EWS. A small number of right whales occupied the waters off Florida into late March, and the FWC flew additional, supplemental surveys in April that covered the Southern Seasonal Management Area (SMA), critical habitat, and offshore waters (see table below for details).

The season got off to a slow start for the aerial survey teams as effort was severely hampered with what seemed to be endless rain, wind, and fog that caused many frustrating days. However, the final outcome produced effort (total trackline miles flown) that was surprisingly similar to previous seasons for some teams. Survey effort and right whale sightings are summarized in Table 1.

The survey teams documented 19 mother-calf pairs. This number falls short of the 2009 season of 39 calves, but is close to the average for the last 10 years (22 calves). Of the 19 mother-calf pairs, four of the whales were documented with their first known calves (Catalog #3123, #3142,