

Press Release (For Immediate Release)

December 11, 2013

Whales of Guerrero Research Project Strengthens Team, Procures Equipment, Forms Alliances With Respected Whale Scientists

From November 20, 2013 – December 15, 2013, Katherina Audley, founder of the Whales of Guerrero Research Project attended the Society for Marine Mammalogy's 20th annual conference, in the capacity of the Society's webmaster, and met with some of the world's most respected marine mammal scientists who offered to become involved in the Whales of Guerrero Research Project as project advisors, to loan the project equipment and software and pending future funding, to join the project on the water as researchers and guest scientists.

In addition to this New Zealand trip, Audley traveled to Ross, California in early November and **met with Oceanic Society at their company headquarters** where she met with Rod Mast, the CEO and Wayne Sentman, the Director of International Ecotourism **to discuss future ecotourism opportunities** in Playa Blanca and the extended area surrounding Zihuatanejo. As a result of the meeting, Oceanic Society CEO, Rod Mast, plans on visiting Playa Blanca this winter to spend time with the project on the water to assess and develop marine ecotourism and citizen science opportunities which he can feature on Oceanic Society's website beginning in 2014.

Visiting Biologists Update

Andy Wex, singing biology teacher extraordinaire, has been secured passage to visit Playa Blanca from February 1-8, 2014 to assess the potential for cross-cultural teaching opportunities and to share his knowledge of humpback whales and other local marine biology with the local community. The project expects to hold a special community event for the members of the Playa Blanca beach community who supported the project while Andy is in town. Participants and supporters of the project will go on science walks, have science talks, and maybe even get Andy to sing some whale-related songs.

Oscar Frey and Keith May of Deep Blue Conservancy determined that it would be best for the project if the Whales of Guerrero leaders were to

travel to their region to undergo the safe whale watch training, learn how to conduct a line transect population and distribution study and collect whale fluke identification photos, as their familiarity with their territory would allow them to expose us to a variety of environments and behaviors in the setting most well known to them. And so **Pablo Mendizabal and Katherina Audley will fly to Puerto Vallarta on January 5, 2014 and go to 'whale school' with Deep Blue Conservancy for 5 days.** Mendizabal and Audley will take extensive notes and bring back their learnings to Barra de Potosi and the extended ecotourism focused community. **Deep Blue Conservancy will travel to Barra de Potosi in March 2014 to conduct a safe whale watching workshop and work on the water with our local fishermen and community members** who are interested in becoming whale watch guides, after the tourist season has subsided somewhat and members of the local community are more available to participate in the workshop. The project hopes to finalize the exact dates in March when Deep Blue Conservancy will visit by the end of the year.

Word is getting out about the Whales of Guerrero Research Project - Troncones and Zihuatanejo want to be involved! Individuals from these communities have reached out with enthusiasm for the project and in some cases made generous donations and committed to fundraising to help us to be able to expand the study and project to their area in coming years. **The Whales of Guerrero Research Project team leaders are looking forward to meeting with these communities over the winter, presenting our project, and identifying team leaders who will be able to help with and support the project in an expanded area over the next 5 years.**

Three grant proposals have been written and submitted over the past three months to fund the from 2014-2015. Grant proposals were submitted to: the Department of Fish and Wildlife - Wildlife Without Borders Program, Save Our Seas Foundation and the Phoenix Zoo.

The **key equipment and insurance necessary to launch the project has been purchased** including a DSLR camera and lens appropriate for long distance fluke identification shots taken from a boat, an IR thermometer, a range finder and insurance for the camera.

The Portland-based donor appreciation party was held on November 23, 2013. Approximately 60 project supporters and their

families attended the party, 50 pounds of pork were prepared by Patrick Weishampel, Randy Eskelin and Randy Dittmar. Bobby Robertson, Heather and Lucy Angell, and many others formed a team of tortilla makers, and Jen Kilcoyne fed everyone top shelf tequila out of her glass tequila shotgun. A delightful performance was given by Andy Wex (as singing biologist), Joseph White (as whale model) and Jim Prescott (as musical accompaniment) and speeches of gratitude and recognition were made by the project founder.

We Need a Christmas Funding Miracle!

While the key mission of the Whales of Guerrero Research remains the same – to conduct a population and distribution survey of the humpback whales in a place they have never before been studied, teach local fishermen, boat operators and community members about whales and marine wildlife and optimal boat operation, support the development of an informed, responsible, self-sustaining whale watch guide service and increase marine ecotourism in the region - project logistics have shifted, as they do. **Changing logistics have led the Whales of Guerrero Research Project to come in short on its Winter 2014 funding needs.** Unanticipated additional project costs included a flight to Oceanic Society Headquarters in Ross, California, more flights and accommodation in Puerto Vallarta for Katherina Audley and Pablo Mendizabal for five days in January and equipment insurance. **The total funding required to accomplish the Winter 2014 objectives is now \$20,520. The Project has received \$16,995 and has \$3525 left to raise.**

Every donation – small or large – helps a lot!

Please share this project with your community and consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Whales of Guerrero Research Project on your own, for your company or give a charitable donation on someone's behalf as a gift or tribute. The project has beautiful stickers, certificates of appreciation and offer many perks from website acknowledgement to boat rides and behind the scenes tours with biologists. Please visit and send your friends and family to the project website, <http://www.whalesinmexico.com> to find out how to support and get involved!

Angel of the Month:

The Whales of Guerrero Research Project is sending out whale-sized thanks to Laura Kelly of [La Casa del Encanto](#) for the generous donation of a week of free accommodation at her beautiful bed and breakfast to Katherina Audley during the first week of the project. Audley's family

house at Loma Bonita has suffered some setbacks recently and may require a fair amount of additional set up to be easy to live in this winter. This soft, welcoming landing will allow Katherina to begin work immediately upon her arrival on January 10, 2014.

Next Steps:

Katherina Audley and Pablo Mendizabal will travel to Puerto Vallarta on January 5 for 5 days to study the practice of fluke identification, safe boat operation around humpback whales, line transect population and distribution studies with Oscar Frey and Keith May of Deep Blue Conservancy. Upon completion of this visit, they will fly directly to Zihuatanejo on January 10, 2014 and begin the field season.

All involved in the project are looking forward to arriving in Mexico in January and getting out on the water for what will hopefully be a very productive and successful launch!

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