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NORTHWEST MARINE TRADE ASSOCIATION

One otter, one plastic bag

In December I took advantage of a sunny afternoon to do my 6-mile training run down the ship canal to the far end of Lake Union and back. If I keep up a good pace I can usually make the loop in just under an hour. I was no more than a dozen strokes from the launch ramp when I saw a plastic bag floating on the water. It was far enough away that I had second thoughts about going after it—sometimes I have to decide between my timed workout and collecting trash—but I couldn't help but remember a disturbing image of a mother sea otter trying to free her pup from a plastic bag. (The photo is on page 44 of this issue.) I looped around and picked up the bag. That bag, at least, wouldn't create a problem for the river otters in the area.

The problem of plastic debris in our waters goes far beyond the urban waterways of Seattle. At the Golden Gate Sea Kayak Symposium last year, I attended a presentation on the impact of plastic on our oceans. The statistics were overwhelming. The numbers were so large as to be meaningless, and they had to be translated into images of plastic bottles circling the globe and cigarette butts (yep, they're plastic) filling stadiums. The intent of the numbers was to compel those of us in the audience to make changes to solve the problem. Paradoxically, they can have the opposite effect. A book I've been reading, *The Upside of Irrationality*, by Dan Ariely, takes a look at what moves us to act or not to act. Our inaction can be the result of several things. There is the drop-in-the-bucket effect: If a problem exists on a massive scale, our individual contribution to solving it may seem insignificant and pointless. Remoteness—mid-ocean gyres of minuscule plastic particles—can also contribute to a lack of motivation to act.

The errant plastic bag I picked up was one of hundreds of billions used every year, an infinitesimal part of the problem, and my picking it up was an infinitesimal part of the solution. I can't hold that scale of the problem in my head and I'd rather not have my single efforts perched over such a large denominator. It's too easy to think, "Why bother?"

The image of the mother sea otter in this issue is something that makes its appeal to us not on a rational level but on an emotional one. It's easy to find empathy with the mother otter and feel her desperation to save her pup. It's not so easy to see or to identify with a faceless jellyfish in the Pacific consuming a dose of tiny plastic particles along with the zooplankton that sustains it. They both speak to the same problem, but one can lead to action, the other to ennui. Ariely writes: "When we can't see the small details, suffering is less vivid, less emotional and we feel less compelled to act." The picture of the otter provides those small details, and their effect captures us more than the large numbers embedded in statistics.

Whatever the size of a problem, all action, whether contributing to it or solving it, is ultimately individual. If you find global problems overwhelming, focus on your part of the world, even if only on what you can see and touch. In our kayaks we have an advantage over other boats. We are close enough to the water and slow enough to make it easy for us to reach over the side to pick up flotsam that everyone else passes by. We like to think of kayaks as being low impact—they don't burn fuel, throw large wakes or make a lot of noise—but we can do better than low impact. Every time we go out kayaking we have an opportunity to have a positive impact and leave the waters and beaches better off for our presence.

Christopher Cunningham

Dan Linehan

A family of visitors in rental kayaks chats with Team OCEAN kayaker Jenny East in the kelp beds near Monterey's Cannery Row.

Team OCEAN: Kayakers with a Cause

by Dan Linehan

Once I had paddled past the seawall protecting Monterey Harbor, Steinbeck's Cannery Row stretched westward ahead of me along the coastline where Monterey Bay opens up to the Pacific Ocean. Scattered across the bay, bright yellow and orange sit-on-top kayaks bobbed in the waves. Over a hundred yards away from me were three kayakers on a course that would take them directly into a small raft of sea otters nestled in the midst of a kelp bed. I was the fastest kayak in our fleet and closed in fast to head them off. The paddlers turned toward me and I saw their eyes scan the stenciling on the side of my kayak that read "NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY." A NOAA insignia was on the foredeck as well as on my PFD, which also had quite the official-looking radio antenna poking out of a breast pocket.

The trio was a father paddling with his young son in a tandem and a mom paddling a single. My approach brought a guarded look over the dad's face.

"How are you doing?" I asked with a smile. "I'm a volunteer with Team OCEAN working for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. We're on the water answering questions for people about the sea life and the bay."

I also told them that Team OCEAN—for Ocean Conservation Education Action Network—was a stewardship program and that they could think of me and other volunteers as similar to information placards they might find along a hike in a nature preserve, only afloat and a bit more interactive.

Almost immediately the family opened up. I pulled up alongside and grabbed a strand of giant kelp to use as an anchor. They shared some of their observations and asked, "What all is out here?"

I knew that most visitors usually have megafauna—whales and seals—in mind. The adults were engaged as I told them about the marine mammals in the area, but the young boy's attention was waning. "Oh, and there are sharks, of course," I said. Mom wasn't particularly happy to hear this, but the kid sure perked up.

I pointed to the sea otters in the kelp ahead of them, explaining how important it was to keep a good distance away. They hadn't even noticed the otters. That wasn't much of a surprise to me. Novice kayakers miss a lot of things.

As more people take to kayaks to explore waterways like Monterey Bay and beyond, there is an increasing need to promote stewardship among new paddlers. Team OCEAN aims at improving awareness about the ocean and all its scaly, hairy, feathery, blubbery, crusty and slimy inhabitants, and is a good example of a program that has been successful in promoting volunteerism and conveying the message of ocean interconnectivity. What we've learned at Team OCEAN can help you generate ideas about how to extend stewardship outreach, at a group or individual level, in your community.

Starting up with Team OCEAN

I grew up canoeing on rivers and lakes around my home on Long Island, New York. But when I later moved to California, I found myself without a paddle in my hands for ten years even though I lived just a few blocks from

Monterey Bay. There was always something that kept me off the water. In 2005, Natalie Zayas, a friend and a professor of environmental studies, told me about the Team OCEAN program she had joined a year earlier. It seemed like a perfect fit and gave me some very important reasons to get back on the water.

Run by the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) under the auspices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Team OCEAN began as a monthlong pilot program in 2000. Lisa Emanuelson, the Team OCEAN coordinator, said, "There was a big meeting with the Coast Guard and kayak shops and advocacy groups to figure out if there was a need and how best to structure a program." At first the team was just a couple of staff members who went out and talked to kayakers in heavily trafficked areas on Monterey Bay.

What was discovered after that first season proved to be the most important part of the program moving forward. One of the staff suggested that the program could be a great opportunity for volunteers. Donations of kayaks and equipment got things off to a good start.

A decade later and with a full complement of volunteers, Team OCEAN operates around Cannery Row in Monterey and 20 miles north in Elkhorn Slough, one of the best places on the West Coast for bird-watching. A local kayak shop partners with Team OCEAN to provide kayak training for team members and storage for kayaks and gear at both locations.

Each year, new volunteers participate in a series of training lectures that covers marine mammals, seabirds, kelp forests, oceanography and more. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, one staff member and three volunteers paddle in six-hour shifts. First-year volunteers have a commitment to paddle two shifts a month for the season.

Although Team OCEAN started out as a very small program with pretty meager means, it has grown ever since. From 2000 to 2010, a total of 63,476 people have been approached by the team. Like the family I talked to, most of these people are new to kayaking and aren't from Monterey. Fortunately, most encounters are pleasant, even those that start off with a warning. Some people just don't know how easily their visit can harm the sensitive wildlife in the area, but because they've taken the time to come out on the water to enjoy it, they are almost always receptive to learning more about the animals and why they need to be protected.

"What's good about the program," says Emanuelson, "is that it is not just helping the wildlife, but it is also out there educating folks and, we hope, inspiring them to realize that they could have an impact in the ocean, maybe they want to come back and volunteer, and maybe they want get involved in other stewardship activities in their neighborhoods."

What we've learned at Team OCEAN can help you generate ideas about how to extend stewardship outreach, at a group or individual level, in your community.

Volunteering

I felt the need to get on the water but more importantly the need to do my part safeguarding a place I'd come to cherish. I wasn't alone. About two hundred volunteers have come from completely different backgrounds and paddling abilities to volunteer for Team OCEAN. Some volunteers have tremendous experience and knowledge about wildlife and the environment before coming into the program, but not everyone does. Team OCEAN allows for the chance to learn more from both inside and outside the program.

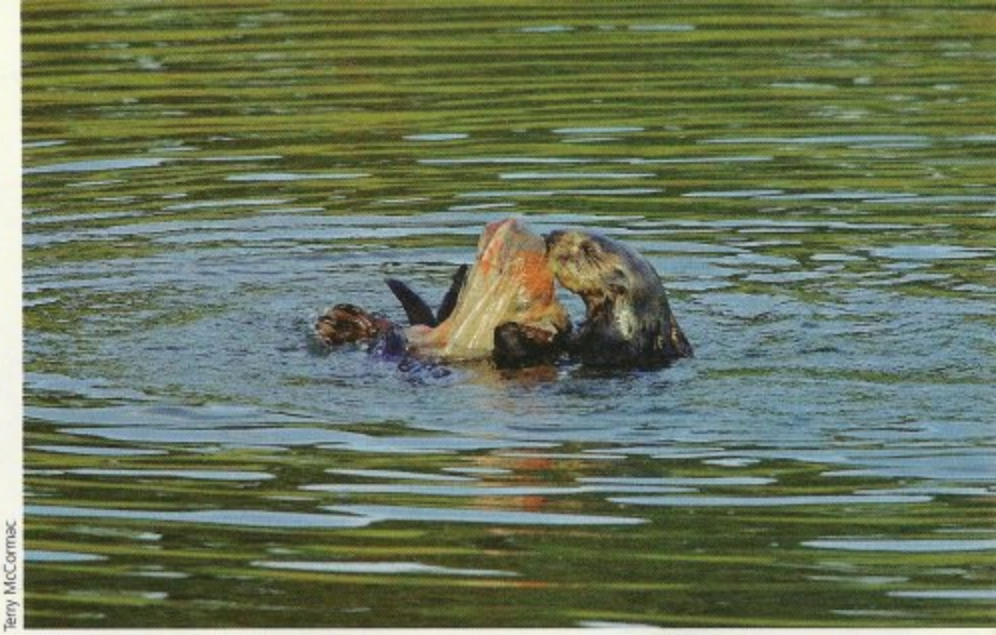
Jenny East, who used to volunteer for the Beach Naturalists Program in Seattle, says, "I talked to people about what they were seeing at low tide in the intertidal zone and about stewardship. When I moved to Monterey, I heard there was an opportunity with Team OCEAN where I could do similar naturalist work with stewardship and conservation messages, but on a kayak. I want to make sure that when people are on kayaks and out on their own exploring that they are aware of how their behavior can impact the organisms. But I also want to get them excited about what they are seeing."

East really enjoyed talking with people and found that being proactive, having a positive attitude and paying attention to some social cues really helped her connect with the kayakers she encountered, even if she'd had to intervene after they had disturbed wildlife. She believed that by being courteous and informative in her approach kayakers would make better decisions on their own if they returned to paddle Monterey Bay. Ron Eby joined Team OCEAN in 2005 after retiring from the Navy and a second career in telecommunications. He had little experience with the marine science world to start with, but ended up becoming a staff member and the caretaker at Elkhorn Slough. He took a break from his Team OCEAN duties during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and spent several months rescuing animals. For Lori Beraha, who has been on staff for ten years, Team OCEAN was her first naturalist job. Now she is a top whale-watching tour guide in Monterey and also serves as a naturalist aboard cruise ships.

Cleanup

When Patrick Whelan arrived in Monterey, his love of the outdoors and wildlife quickly lured him into becoming an avid sea kayaker. He joined Team OCEAN in 2010, and like many Team OCEAN kayakers, also volunteered his

In the best cases, people informed of the hazards trash poses to marine life will decide to help clean up. Even if they grab just one plastic bag from the water, that's action.



Terry McCormac

Near the mouth of Elkhorn Slough a mother sea otter tries to remove a plastic bag from one of her offspring.

time and energy to other organizations. He joined the Marine Debris Community Outreach Project (MDCOP), a one-year program designed to spread awareness about plastic pollution, a problem that is destroying wildlife and devastating the environment on a massive scale.

Several other Team OCEAN members, including myself, also participated in MDCOP and use what we learned about marine debris when we paddle.

Collecting garbage from the water and affixing it to the deck of the kayak where the people I approach can see it not only helps keep the waters and beaches clean but also is a great way to exhibit all the junk floating around out there. It opens up discussions about how to minimize the problem. Plastic bags, just one of the countless examples of garbage floating in the water, are a huge problem for marine life. Animals can get entangled in them and die, and sea turtles often mistake them for jellyfish. The turtles eat the bags then starve to death because their stomachs have no room left for real food.

Collecting trash for proper disposal is about the simplest way you can introduce stewardship to people and possibly keep some of them from tossing their trash overboard. In the best cases, people informed of the hazards trash poses to marine life will decide to help clean up. Even if they grab just one plastic bag from the water, that's action. That's a start.

Ocean Wildlife Interconnectivity

Team OCEAN volunteers who talk with kayakers do more than just cite facts about one animal or another. One of the essential parts of their outreach, and one that is fundamental to stewardship, is educating people about the interconnectedness of life in the ocean.

Sea otters, once hunted to the brink of extinction and still struggling to make a comeback, are among the most recognizable and sought-after animals in Monterey Bay and provide a great example of how a marine ecosystem works.

An 80-pound sea otter eats about 24 pounds of food a day and sea urchins are one of its favorite foods. This turns out to be a very good thing for the health of Monterey Bay. The bay owes much of its diversity and abundant sea life to the giant kelp that grow along the coast. Giant kelp beds are the ocean's equivalent of terrestrial rain forests. Countless species feed and reproduce, grow and find refuge among long strands of leafy kelp fronds. The kelp forests are also nurseries for the fish we eat. Aside from sheltering sea life, giant kelp also provide a barrier to temper waves as they approach shore, helping to protect the waterfront from erosion.

Even though giant kelp is one of the fastest growing organisms on the planet, it doesn't stand a chance against sea urchins. In fact, sea urchins are responsible for destroying kelp forests up and down the West Coast, leaving "urchin barrens" in their wake.

Sea otters keep the sea urchin population in check and help protect the giant kelp. Without the otters, the whole ecosystem would collapse. Another example is the shark-ray-shellfish relationship in Chesapeake Bay. Cownose rays eat clams and oysters; the shellfish thrive only when sharks prey on the rays and keep that population in check.

To stay healthy, sea otters must rest about half the day. They sleep on their backs, and giant kelp beds are a great place for them to anchor themselves, keep warm and find sanctuary. But when kayakers get too close, as the family I spoke to was about to do, they disturb

Dan Linehan

Team OCEAN paddlers Jerry Speraw (left) and Robert Scoles (right) show the intricacies of the kelp forest to a group of kayaking tourists.

the otters' rest and cause them to expend energy they are trying to conserve. If a sea otter has to roll on its stomach, swim away, or dive to flee, it then has to find a new safe location, fill its fur back up with air bubbles and dry off before trying to sleep again. This would not be too drastic if the problem were only one approaching kayak. But kayak after kayak, drawing near day after day, puts an unhealthy strain on the sea otters. Just imagine how you'd feel if you were awakened repeatedly every night, let alone forced to find another place to sleep each time.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) is a federal law enacted in 1972 that prohibits the hunting, harassing, capturing and killing of marine mammals. Most of these prohibitions are pretty straightforward for people to understand and abide by. However, knowing what is "harassing" and what "isn't harassing" is one distinction that people seem to have trouble with. The law defines harassment as "any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering." If a marine mammal turns to look at you, then you are too close. It is not just curious. It is likely worrying about its safety. If it ends up moving because of you, you have disrupted its behavioral patterns and have violated the MMPA. Too many people seem to have the attitude that the animals are there to enrich our lives and aren't aware of how detrimental their presence is to the lives of the animals.

Afloat in kayaks on a canopy of giant kelp at a safe distance from a raft of sea otters, Team OCEAN volunteers have an ideal means of communicating how to respect the needs of wildlife in the area.

If a marine mammal turns to look at you, then you are too close. It is not just curious. It is likely worrying about its safety.

Making Contact

One of the challenges of any outreach is engaging people, but it turns out to be easier than you might think when you're making the approach kayak to kayak. Team OCEAN volunteers adapt their message to add to others' experience on the water rather than getting in the way of it.

As an example, one day Robert Scoles from Team OCEAN paddled over to a group of kayakers, Michelle Peters, Kristi Peters, Nicole Larmore and Rob Essary, who were visiting Monterey and planned on paddling to the Aquarium and back. They didn't quite make it that far before Robert approached them.

"We grew up on water being from Michigan," said Michelle of the group. "So we spent a lot of time in lakes but obviously didn't spend much time exploring the ocean. The whole idea was new to us, so we were pretty hesitant. Initially we thought we did something wrong, but we quickly learned that he was there to talk about the wildlife surrounding us."

Robert soon had Michelle help pull a giant kelp plant onto the kayaks so they could all get a closer look. "Everything we learned was extremely interesting. We learned about several different species of kelp. We learned that some are perennial and some are annual and the ways in which they obtain nutrients to live and grow. Robert pointed out the different types of jellyfish and crabs and snails."

After the Team OCEAN kayak left, Michelle and her group paddled around the kelp bed, poking and prodding along instead of paddling farther ahead. Michelle's sister Kristi was initially afraid to touch even the kelp, but that didn't last. I was also in the area and from a distance heard her call out with excitement, "I found a crab!" I turned to see her holding up a kelp crab that was three times the size of her hand.

Michelle lives in Colorado and is completing an MBA in sustainability. While

reflecting on her first experience in a kayak, she said, "My interaction with Team OCEAN encouraged me to identify preservation opportunities closer to home."

Spreading Stewardship

Team OCEAN's affiliation with MBNMS and NOAA gives volunteers some immediate credibility and helps them make a good first impression when contacting other boaters. But you don't need to have a connection to an organization to take an active role in stewardship. Stewardship begins by simply putting your kayak in the water and doing one thing that makes a difference. Saying something as simple as, "I'm a local kayaker trying to share awareness about the marine environment" goes a long way toward getting people to listen. Approaching people is something I've found gets easier with practice. Sometimes it's just a matter of pointing out dolphins swimming by. Sometimes words of encouragement or technique advice are all that kayakers need to join in a conversation.

People with a passionate interest in preserving the environment are not confined to Monterey Bay. They are everywhere. Like Team OCEAN members, individual kayakers and kayak clubs can discover opportunities for stewardship all around.

Keep an eye out for events happening in your community and volunteer your services. The Ocean Conservancy (www.oceanconservancy.org) sponsors an International Coastal Cleanup Day and American Rivers (www.americanrivers.org) sponsors a National River Cleanup. For 2011's Coastal Cleanup Day, a Monterey-based conservation group called Save Our Shores organized beach cleanups all along Monterey Bay. Many kayakers got on the water and pitched in.

> Stewardship begins by simply putting your kayak in the water and doing one thing that makes a difference.

Stewardship promotes protection, awareness and understanding. It helps ensure that the precious resources our marine environment yields are around for future generations. When asked about how to continue to foster stewardship, Patrick Whelan thought up this question to pose to those of us who use the ocean: "Do you think it is worth your while to help advocate for the ocean and would you be willing to volunteer time to protect the resources that you are getting so much enjoyment from?"

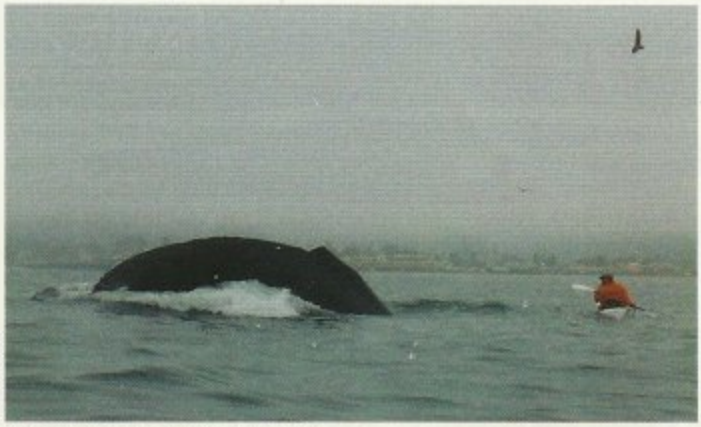
TeamOCEAN can be used as a model to help build your own stewardship endeavors, but the needs and the resources that are available locally will shape just how they can be formed in your community. The experiences, knowledge, expertise, talent and creativity of those involved will help generate the opportunities to make it happen. It may take time to grow and evolve, as it did with Team OCEAN. People can't do everything that needs to be done, but they can certainly do something meaningful that makes a difference and inspires others. It's that first step and that first paddle stroke that matter most. **SK**

Dan Linehan lives in Monterey, Calif. He was born and educated in New York and has degrees in electrical engineering, physics and materials engineering. After years of working with superconductors and microchips he left his life as an engineer behind and now makes his living as a freelance writer. His latest book, a biography, is Burt Rutan's Race to Space. *You can reach him through his website: www.dslinehan.com*

Close Encounters of the Wrong Kind

The need for educating kayakers and other boaters about conduct in a marine sanctuary with federally protected animals was made quite clear in the autumn of 2011. Anchovies had schooled less than a mile from the Santa Cruz harbor mouth and brought several humpback whales close to the shores of Monterey Bay. Team OCEAN had finished their work for the summer tourist season. With the unexpected arrival of humpback whales and an unprecedented gathering of kayaks taking place, Team OCEAN mobilized. By the time Team OCEAN was on the water to intervene and educate kayakers and boaters, the whales had moved offshore.

We sought out the perspectives of a few of the people who witnessed the events. *– Christopher Cunningham, editor*



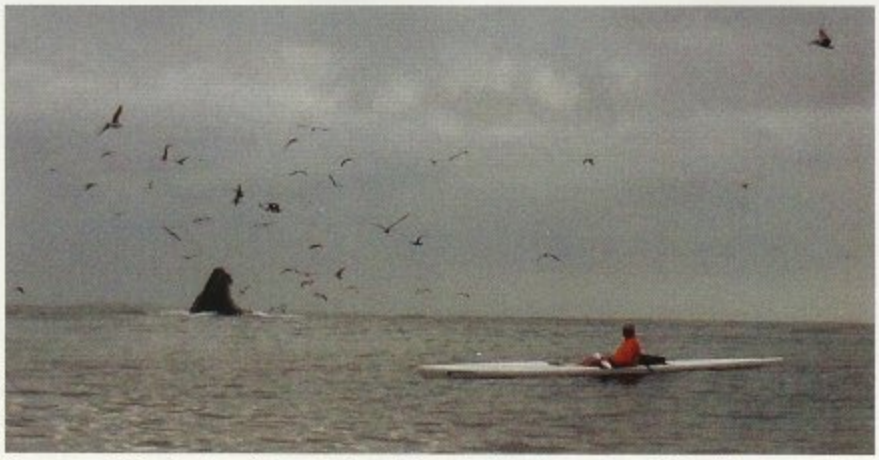
Steve Lawson

David Swanger and a lone humpback.

David Swanger
Kayaker, retired professor, poet

"When the humpback whales came to within half a mile of the Santa Cruz, California shoreline, they appeared first in small numbers, then in pods of four to six. Usually humpbacks in our part of Monterey Bay stay ten miles or more offshore, but for two and a half months they were visible from the city's beaches and bluffs.

"My kayaking friends, Penny Chesluk, Lewis Aptekar and Steve Lawson, and I may have been the first to spot the whales. Our sighting of a single whale took place on August 17th. Steve carries a camera when we kayak, and a photo he took (at left) at exactly the right moment appeared the next day on the front page of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, August 18, 2011. The story was then picked up by the *San Jose Mercury* and quickly became a TV news story. Unfortunately, the TV



Steve Lawson

Swanger and friends returned to watch the whales and tried to keep at least 100 yards away.

story sensationalized our encounter with the humpback.

"The whales were in the same place day after day. Each morning when we went out, we could find the whales by the cacophony of seagulls over them. Regulations reminded us to keep our distance—a hundred yards—and we tried at all times not to harass the humpbacks. Our encounters were bucolic, with plenty of open space for the whales and few if any other boats around. I confess to not imagining crowds; but as word of the whales' presence spread, more and more people came on the water and many crowded the leviathans."

Robert Yerena
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's enforcement officer for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

"On the 26th of October I saw an article in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* with a photograph of a kayaker right next to a couple of humpback whales that were feeding.* That caught my attention, but I thought it was just a rare instance where a kayaker was out there as a whale was just transiting through. The following morning I saw in the early morning news that the whales were still in the area and attracting a large number of kayak users. That was on Thursday, so on Friday I went out to Santa Cruz and from the shoreline I was able to observe dozens and dozens of kayakers surrounding about seven humpback whales. I believe there were three juvenile whales and four adult whales. They were less than a mile offshore from the harbor entrance there in Santa Cruz. It gave me great concern that there were that many kayakers so close to the whales. Somebody was going to get hurt.

"The water was just teeming with anchovies, and that's why the whales were there. The anchovies congregated right in that area and it attracted the whales; it was easy foraging for them and they weren't going to leave until they had their fill. My concern was that the concentration of kayaks around these whales was going to spook them and disrupt their feeding habits. To me that's unacceptable. It's also illegal. This is their home and they need to feed on their long journey south.

"I went over to the harbormaster's office. There was a deputy harbor patrol officer there. I requested that he and his crew going out on their routine daily patrols tell people to back off at least 100 yards from the whales. From there I went to several of the kayak shops near the harbor and explained what was happening. I knew that more people were going to show up to rent kayaks. They needed to know that they had to stay 100 yards from the animals for their safety and that there was a law against harassing these whales. Then I called one of the commercial whale-watching boats, and they agreed to go out and warn folks to stay back 100 yards from the whales.

"By Sunday, what had been two dozen kayakers went to over a hundred, and that attracted media attention. For one full day I watched the whales from shore with binoculars and observed the activities of the kayakers. It all seemed kind of comical because as soon as the whales came up to feed, the whole scene would shift to that area. Then the whales would dive and the kayakers would wait. Wherever the birds

The shot made national news and the kayaker in the photo was later interviewed on the local television news. He said he had been paddling with the whales for several hours. When he saw seagulls were congregating he'd paddle to that area because that's where the whales would surface. On one occasion he had to duck to keep from being struck by the tail of one of the humpbacks. —Ed.

were, the kayaks would shift to that area. It wasn't that the whales were coming to them. It was definitely the kayakers going to the whales.

"Any chance the kayakers had they would rapidly paddle—and we're talking twenty, thirty or forty kayakers out there—chasing the whales around. It's amazing that nobody got seriously hurt.

"The motorboats were more cautious and had a more stand-off attitude. At any one time there might have been between five and 10 motorized vessels less than 30 feet in length. My concern with the motorboats was propeller strikes. We had two commercial whale-watching boats in the area. We also had numerous surfers paddle out. We had stand-up paddlers. Some of these guys were out there without life vests. I was concerned about that. Had a whale come up and knocked them off their boards or destroyed their boards, we were going to have problems. We had to alert the Coast Guard about that and they were out there making sure that if they were going to be out that far, they had to have life vests on.

"Monday morning, first thing, I went out with harbormaster Don Kinneman in his vessel and we went from kayak to kayak just warning people to maintain that 100-yard distance and to let the animals feed. The local newspaper published an announcement that we were going to start issuing citations. We weren't telling the public that they couldn't go out, just that we were out there to have them keep their distance. That seemed to work pretty well on Monday. Everyone was cooperating. People were out there just to get a closer look. I didn't have anyone who challenged us and they stayed back. When we were there everyone gave the whales their space. It was late in the day when we left, and as we were getting ready to enter the harbor we looked back and the kayaks resumed chasing the whales.

"On Tuesday, we took out our 47-foot patrol vessel. We had enforcement officers from the Coast Guard and sanctuary staff members. We arrived in Santa Cruz and noticed that the whales were now gone. There were about 20 kayakers out there at about nine o'clock in the morning waiting for the whales to show up. They had their cameras and they came up to our boat and asked us where the whales had gone. We had reports from some of the fishing community that the whales were heading south toward Moss Landing in the Monterey area. We waited around until that afternoon and we saw only two whales and they were moving fast, transiting the area, and we soon lost sight of them.

"Short of us closing the docks and the boat ramp and the Coast Guard announcing a buffer zone around the whales, folks are going to go out there. People want to get close to the whales. It's a rare event. I've been here nine years and it's the first time I've experienced something like this. Some of the locals have said that it's happened before but it has been twenty-plus years ago. It's all due to the anchovies congregating in what they call bait balls, right there in front of the harbor.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for folks to get up close to the whales. For the most part, everyone had real nice cameras with long lenses and could have gotten their pictures from a safe distance. You can talk all day long until you're blue in the face, but when they get out there the whales are like a magnet. Even after I explain what the dangers are, and about the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, they still insist on getting close to the animals."

Lori Beraha
Kayaker and marine naturalist

"I was invited to go out sailing to see the humpbacks that had been feeding close to shore. We saw the whales from a distance as we came out of the harbor and I expected we would just continue sailing in the other direction. I was surprised when the three boats in our group started sailing directly for the whales. I told one of the crew that I felt there were way too many boats around, getting way too close to the whales. At one point two humpbacks came up very close to the boat I was on and made a trumpeting sound which is sometimes interpreted as aggressive. It may also just be a way for whales to communicate location. No one really knows the meaning or purpose of 'trumpeting', but I have observed this behavior on several occasions.

The bait ball gave the water a reddish tint.

Robert Scoles

Robert Scoles

Photographed from shore through a spotting scope, the plume of mist exhaled by a humpback is surrounded by kayaks.

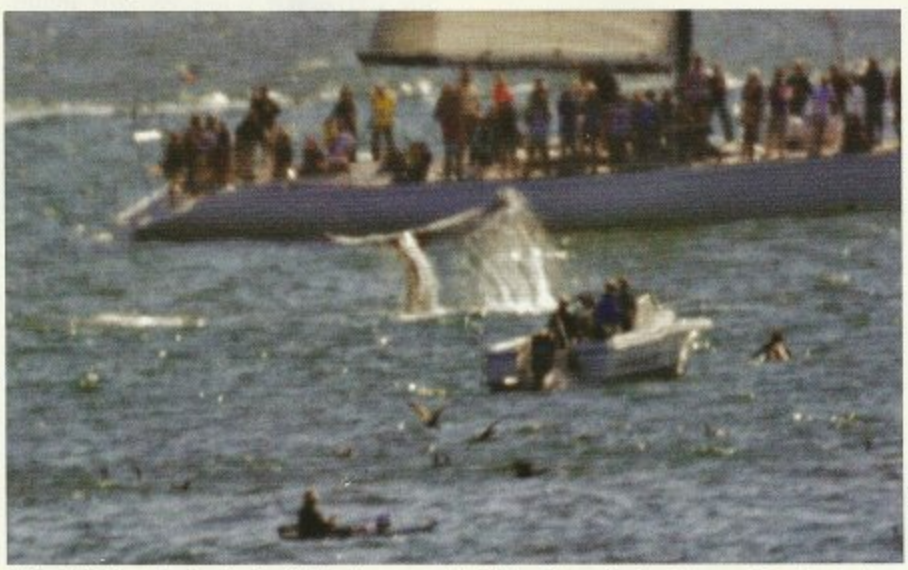
"I counted over 13 boats in very close proximity to the whales. Sailboats, powerboats, several kayaks, an outrigger canoe and several stand-up paddle boards were completely surrounding and chasing the whales. It got to the point where I wondered how the whales could possibly keep track of all the obstacles floating around them. People aboard sailboats, kayaks or paddleboards may think that because they don't have a motor they will not be disturbing the whales. But in fact studies have shown that some marine mammals are less disturbed by boats with motors, presumably because they can tell where they are. In any case, when whales are feeding, boaters with or without motors, can not possibly predict where the whales will come up next, so it is very dangerous for both people and whales, not to mention illegal since they are changing and disturbing the whales' natural behavior.

"We were probably about 1,000 yards away from another sailboat in our fleet and we saw its bow dip sharply down. I think it had come up on top of a whale or a whale had come up under it. Soon after, its mast fell, apparently from one of its stays breaking. I learned later that another sailboat lost its keel when it hit one of the same humpback whales and a couple of kayaks flipped. It really was mayhem, a case of loving them to death."

Lisa Emanuelson
Team OCEAN coordinator

Humans are curious creatures. If curiosity killed the cat, it was only slightly before the same fate befell a human. When such large creatures are seen so close to shore, how can we say no to an adventure such as a close encounter with a whale? But at what cost to wildlife is our close encounter? Dozens of boaters, kayakers, paddleboarders and surfers observed the humpbacks, and as a result the whales were pursued like prey. The kayakers I spoke with out on the water all mentioned that "other people" got too close, "other people" chased the whales, but no one said anything to those "other people," even though everyone knew the whales needed some space. Team OCEAN works to educate kayakers about approaching wildlife; however, it can't be everywhere all the time, but we can all help by educating each other. Once-in-a-lifetime experiences like this can be rewarding for those of us on the water, but they need not be to the detriment of those beings in the water. All it takes is a willingness to respect them and to speak up for them, whether you're part of an organization like Team OCEAN or just an individual who cares. **SK**

Links to the news coverage are available at www.seakayakermag.com



Robert Scoles

To feed, this humpback whale will dive down, corral baitfish with a veil of bubbles and then rise to the surface, mouth open, through the concentration of fish. The boats that gathered in the area hampered that process and the whale's ability to take advantage of an abundant food source.