

# WHS PROGRESS REPORT

## CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

- WHALETIME guides:

### Challenge

The WhaleTime project continues to collaborate with the Port Natal Maritime Museum, the KZN Coastal College and local boat-based whale watching operators in training new WhaleTime tour guides, giving them practical skills in the workplace, and creating job opportunities. WILDOCEANS have partnered with the local Youth Employment Service programme (YES) and Nedbank to provide workplace opportunities for local unemployed youth. However due to COVID-19 restrictions at the Port Natal Maritime Museum, no new guides were recruited this year.

### Progress

In 2021, WhaleTime guides presented tours to 460 learners from eleven schools. In addition to the school tours, the guides gave tours to 1272 walk-in guests. WhaleTime has extended the term of two senior guides who train the new, 2022 Youth Employment Service programme (YES) interns as guides. The WhaleTime project will also strive to continue its relationship with the KZN Coastal College by allowing their students to conduct their in-service training as WhaleTime guides. These new guides will also be trained to present the old whaling station tour at the WHS.

- Conservation/ Projects/Program:

### Challenge

WILDOCEANS MSc student Bianca Tree, is conducting research on the population structure and migration links of the Southern African humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) using photo-identification techniques.

Presently there is no single photo identification catalogue available for South Africa. This study aims to collate as many historic humpback whale fluke images available for the C1 sub-stock, into an east coast photo-identification catalogue. New images were also collected within the KwaZulu-Natal region during various dedicated data collection initiatives and boat-based whale watching opportunities, and field studies around Bazaruto, Mozambique and incorporated into the catalogue. The catalogue currently contains nearly 2000 unique humpback whale fluke images from 1988 to 2019, which are in the process of being compared within and between years. Totals of 13 within-year matches, and 21 between-year matches have been obtained to date, with the between-year matching process only 50% complete. It is anticipated that matching results will provide valuable information on the intra-region population structure, site-fidelity trends, and current population status in terms of abundance of the C1 humpback whale population.

The catalogue will also be used in the future for comparison against other regional catalogues within the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), which will aid in providing more accurate information of the inter-

region stock structure of the C-stock humpback whales and is consequently viewed as an important population management tool.

#### Progress

In October 2021, Erin Ross-Marsh, a Groen Sebenza Intern, began her internship under the WhaleTime project. Erin has been analysing bioacoustics recordings recorded off the Durban coastline. The recordings total roughly 1654 hours and are currently being examined for humpback whale song. Excitingly, humpback whale vocalisations (both song and non-song sounds) have been detected, along with vocalisations from other species (odontocetes and fish). Once all recordings have been examined, more in-depth analyses will take place to investigate the timing of the vocalisations as well as their structure and composition. Further, Erin is continuing Bianca Tree's MSc research on humpback whale photo identification.

- [Plastic Pollution, Beach clean-up, Entanglement](#)

#### Challenge

To combat the issue of plastic pollution, one of the projects at WILDOCEANS is focused on the removal of waste from ecologically important areas such as beaches and the Durban Port. The Durban port acts as a sink for waste entering the port from canals and city storm water drainage pipes. This waste is then released into the ocean and washes up on adjacent beaches along the KZN coastline and within the WHS area.

The WILDTRUST started work at the Durban Port and along the adjacent beaches in 2017, collecting waste from the beaches and waterways coming into the port. To date, the team have collected and recycled more than 96 000 kgs of waste.

#### Progress

To understand the complexity of the system, and meet the biggest problems at their source, the Blue Port project is currently broadening the scope of our vision for the port. A new, multi-disciplinary project will develop a socio-ecological (SES) model that considers the complexity of the social, ecological and governance systems, and guides the activities of numerous stakeholders to transform the Durban Bay, from a degraded environment towards a restored and regenerative, productive state that is a productive asset to the blue economy.

- [Shell offshore seismic surveys](#)

#### Challenge

Royal Dutch Shell plc, commonly known as Shell, is a British multinational oil and gas company. In November 2021, Shell were due to begin seismic surveys along the Wild Coast, an area well-known for its high marine biodiversity. Conservationists, concerned citizens, NGOs and other groups like Youth for MPAs, supported by WILDOCEANS, were up in arms to stop Shell from following through with this operation. This activity would have been damaging to marine life and eco-tourism. Seismic

surveys produce a continuous underwater noise, greater than 230 decibels with air guns during day and night for months to map the seafloor in search of gas and oil deposits. This process could have dragged on for over five months with continuous loud shots every 10 seconds, causing prolonged effects on marine life. The long seismic pulses also cause large cetaceans to start avoiding the area and their communication may decrease or increase, signalling higher stress levels. The seismic survey was scheduled to begin during the migration season of the Humpback whales along the South African coastline. This could have had detrimental effects on the cetaceans and their new-born calves migrating back to their feeding grounds.

## Progress

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, Grahamstown High Court in Makhanda ordered Shell to immediately halt seismic survey activities along South Africa's Wild Coast. Shell and the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy were also ordered to pay the costs of the application for the interim interdict. A different high court order gave Shell the go ahead to proceed with the seismic survey and Shell's spokesperson confirmed that the survey had begun. However, as it stands, Judge Gerald Bloem announced that Shell had the duty to meaningfully consult with the communities and individuals who would be impacted by the seismic survey and that based on the evidence provided, Shell failed to do so in the case of the applicant communities who hold customary rights, including fishing rights. This was a victory for the South African coastline, and all its biodiversity.

## Published articles of Y4MPAs involvement.

Youth4MPAs - Armstrong Gumbi	Youth4MPAs Protest Action against Shell PR - Shell on Track to Make a "Shell" of South Africa's Ocean. Youth Say #ToHellWithShell	Online Newspaper	Berea Mail	<a href="https://bereamail.co.za/276114/watch-durbanites-protest-shells-wild-coast-seismic-surveys/">https://bereamail.co.za/276114/watch-durbanites-protest-shells-wild-coast-seismic-surveys/</a>
Youth4MPAs - Merrisa Naidoo	Youth4MPAs Protest Action against Shell PR - Countdown to Disaster for the Wild Coast	Online Newspaper	the green times	<a href="https://thegreentimes.co.za/countdown-to-wild-coast-seismic-blasting-almost-up/">https://thegreentimes.co.za/countdown-to-wild-coast-seismic-blasting-almost-up/</a>
Youth4MPAs - Merrisa Naidoo	Youth4MPAs Protest Action against Shell PR - Watch Durbanites protest Shell's Wild Coast Seismic Surveys		SAPeople Contributor	<a href="https://www.sapeople.com/2021/11/30/shell-on-track-to-make-a-shell-of-south-africas-ocean-youth-s">https://www.sapeople.com/2021/11/30/shell-on-track-to-make-a-shell-of-south-africas-ocean-youth-s</a>