

# Celebration of Conservation

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**SEAMAIL™**

FROM: Dave Weller  
TO: Virtual Team Leaders and Science Team  
SUBJECT: Meet the long distance traveler, the gray whale

Greetings Virtual Team Members!

Every day from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., from the end of March to the beginning of June, we watch for gray whales. There are about 20,000 gray whales in the eastern North Pacific Ocean. Almost all of them migrate past our research site.

This photograph shows our observation site. We use giant binoculars called “big eyes.” We also use smaller binoculars to help us get close up looks at the mothers and their calves.

Why do gray whales pass Piedras Blancas? Twice a year, gray whales travel or migrate. When an animal migrates, it travels longer distances to find food, have babies, or find better weather. Every year, gray whales migrate from the Arctic to Mexico and back again.

Did you know that gray whales have one of the longest annual migrations of any mammal? They swim 9,000 to 12,000 miles, round trip. (That’s 15,000 to 20,000 km.) The whales swim about 4,500 to 6,000 miles each way.

During the summer gray whales feed in the Arctic. They’re mainly found in the Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea, and the northwestern Bering Sea. Can you find all three of these seas on the map or globe?

In the fall, the gray whales migrates south along the coast. They spend the winter on the west coast of Baja California, Mexico. During winter, many of the whales, especially pregnant females stay in safe lagoons along the coast.

Migrating gray whales swim non-stop. That means they swim 24-hours a day! They travel in one direction and breath and dive in predictable patterns. Gray whales usually travel alone or in small groups. Breaching and other surface behaviors are common in this species.

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*Meet the long distance traveler, the gray whale (continued)*

Take a look at the graphs from 2012 to 2015. Can you tell which weeks we usually see the most whales? After the first week of May, the number of calves that swim by our research site begins to decrease. By the first of June, nearly all of the calves will be to the north of us and well on their way to Arctic feeding grounds.

If you walked 6,000 miles in one direction, where you end up? People walk about 3 miles per hour. Can you figure out how many hours or days it would take you to walk 6,000 miles? Why do you think the whales travel without stopping?

Better get back to the big eyes. More next time. Thanks for being part of Team Gray Whale!

*Dr. Dave*

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