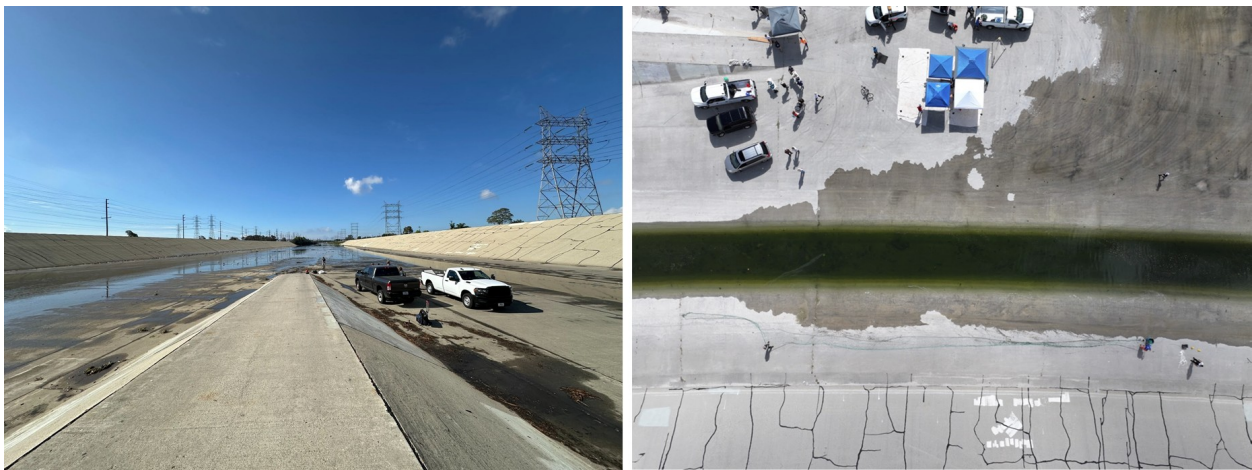


MARINE MAMMAL & TURTLE DIVISION, SWFSC BIWEEKLY REPORT ON FIELDWORK, PUBLICATIONS, RESEARCH RESULTS, AND EVENTS

10 April 2026

I. Fieldwork:

Southern California Green Turtle Survey, San Gabriel River, Long Beach, CA. 1 April 2026 – A team from the Marine Mammal and Turtle Division, led by the Marine Turtle Ecology & Assessment Program, and joined by members from the Marine Turtle Genetics Program and the Cetacean Health and Life History Program (UxS), visited the upriver site of the San Gabriel River in Long Beach, CA, where green sea turtles are congregated in high concentrations. The site is the location of upcoming infrastructure work - necessitating cooperation between NMFS and many regional stakeholders. The objective of the 1 April survey was to capture and sample additional turtles using this highly urban waterway as a year-round foraging area. However, upon arrival at the field site, it was discovered that water had been released from an upriver holding basin(s), thus discharging high flow water into the Coyote Creek and the San Gabriel survey site. While the site was accessible for the research team, the turtles had all apparently moved downstream; no turtles were sighted in the channel (the main capture effort - see photo from Sept. 2025 survey), or in the “pond” (see image showing the locations of a turtle that was fixed with a satellite telemetry tag in Sept. 2025). Despite no turtles being captured, the team learned more about turtle behavior related to water flow, and had productive meetings with collaborators and stakeholders from Caltrans, the NOAA West Coast Regional Office, NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement, California Department of Fish & Game, and the Aquarium of the Pacific. Activities conducted under NMFS Permit #28119. For additional information contact Cali Turner Tomaszewicz or Tomo Eguchi (re: UxS).



Photos: (left photo) The San Gabriel channel, the intended capture site on 1 April 2026 where higher flow of water discharging into the Coyote Creek pushed turtles out of the main capture area of the San Gabriel channel (right photo, from 10 September 2025 survey).



Photo: Locations of a green sea turtle fitted with a satellite telemetry tag during a September 2025 survey - see the concentrated habitat use at the “pond”, excursions in the concrete channel (the target capture area), and the location of the turtle on 30 March just south of the I-405 freeway (red dot with a white outline).

Eastern North Pacific Gray Whale Calf Production Survey, Piedras Blancas Light Station, California 30 March-29 May 2026 –

The first week of MMTD’s annual survey to estimate calf production of eastern North Pacific gray whales concluded on 5 April with three mother-calf pairs counted over 69 hours of effort. Adult and juvenile gray whales were also sighted migrating past the site. Other cetacean sightings included humpback whales and coastal bottlenose, common, and Risso’s dolphins. The observer team during the first week included Aimée Lang, Ariane Huddleston, Erin LaCasella, Rachel Backman, and Victoria Pease. Contact Aimée Lang for more information and see:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/sciencedata/gray-whales-eastern-north-pacific>



Observers Victoria Pease and Rachel Backman on watch during the first week of the survey.

II. Manuscripts accepted for publication:

III. Papers published:

Sepúlveda, M., Barilari, M.F., Deforest, K., Frantz, B., San Martin, M., Guerra, J., Cocas, L., Vega, R., Bernal, C., Montenegro, C., Pérez-Alvarez, M.J., Santos-Carvalho, M., Bedriñana-Romano, L., García-Reyes, M., Palacios, D., Matera, J., Lent, R., **Curtis, K.A.**, & Hines, E. (2026). Bycatch risk assessment for South American sea lions using a GIS-based toolbox. *Biological Conservation*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2026.111810>

Abstract – Bycatch of marine mammals in fisheries is a critical conservation issue worldwide, and Chile is no exception. Pinnipeds such as the South American sea lion (*Otaria byronia*, SASL) frequently encounter fishing gear along the Chilean coast. Despite widespread evidence of these interactions, few studies have spatially assessed SASL bycatch risk across multiple fisheries for this species. This study applies the Bycatch Risk Assessment (ByRA) toolbox, a GIS-based model, to evaluate and compare the risk of SASL bycatch across nine Chilean purse-seine and trawl gear fisheries based on data from on-board scientific observer logs from 2015 to 2019. Our findings identify trawl fisheries, particularly those targeting southern hake (*Merluccius australis*), as posing the highest bycatch risk, especially during the non-reproductive season when SASL exhibit broader spatial distribution. Purse-seine fisheries presented lower risk overall, with the industrial northern fleet showing the highest relative risk. Spatial patterns revealed that risk is concentrated in nearshore areas, where the overlap between the distribution of SASL and fishing activity is the greatest. These results provide a robust, spatially explicit foundation for prioritizing mitigation measures, including the mandatory use of exclusion devices and seasonal restrictions. Our approach underscores the potential mitigation provided by evidence-based management of marine mammal bycatch in Chile and contributes information toward the assessment of compliance with domestic and international regulations.

B.G. Vernazzani, Cabrera, E., **Olson, P.A.**, Cortés-Peña, D., Clegg, I.L.K., Español-Jimenez, S., Häussermann, V., Huckle-Gaete, R., Moraga, R., Palacios, D.M., Pavez, G., Perez-Alvarez, M.J., Ruiz, J., Sironi, M., Toro, F., Torres-Florez, J.P., Wright, S., & **Brownell Jr, R. L.** (2026). Chilean Blue Whales: Fidelity to Feeding Areas and Migratory Connectivity With the Eastern Tropical Pacific. *Marine Mammal Science*: 42:e70164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mms.70164>.

Abstract – In the Eastern South Pacific (ESP), blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus* subsp.) aggregations have been described for two feeding areas (in northern and southern Chile) and in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP). However, despite the knowledge of these areas, little is known about the seasonal movements of blue whales between them. Comparisons of 1074 individual blue whales, photographed across these regions from 1992 to 2019, resulted in re-sightings of 107 individuals. Photo-identification comparisons were conducted using the Southern Hemisphere Blue Whale Catalog, a collaborative platform for sharing photo-identification data among 21 research groups from 7 nations. A total of 92 matches were found within the southern Chile feeding area and 13 matches within the northern Chile feeding area. High site fidelity was found for the southern Chile feeding area (return rates $\geq 43\%$). The longest interval between the first and last sighting was 17 years. There was no exchange between northern and

southern Chile feeding areas. Two matches revealed long-distance connectivity and migration of blue whales from southern Chile to the Galápagos Islands in the southern ETP. There were no matches between Chile and the Costa Rica Dome, farther north in the ETP, a location known for the year-round presence of blue whales. The results highlight the importance of collaboration to understand blue whale movements and migration patterns. Our results provide valuable ESP and ETP region-wide data toward understanding population structure and informing conservation and management strategies, population assessments, and/or delineating biologically important areas.

IV. Research findings:

V. Press:

VI. Local events - meetings or events hosted in-person or virtually:

VII. Travel - meetings attended in-person or virtually:

VIII. Awards, grants, and recognition:

IX. Other of note:

Stranding summary for the weeks of 24 March - 6 April 2026

Cetaceans: 1 (no response)

- On 26 March, a Natural Resources Contractor from the Navy notified us of an estimated 30-40-foot-long gray whale in a state of moderate decomposition stranded in Pyramid Cove on San Clemente Island. Due to its location in the impact area, no access was available for further investigation.

Pinnipeds: 9 (no response)

Turtles: 0

X. Where-about of Division Director:

La Jolla