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NORTH ATLANTIC
KILLER WHALES

Guest Editors

Jóhann Sigurjónsson Stephen Leatherwood

HAFRANNSÓKNASTOFNUNIN
MARINE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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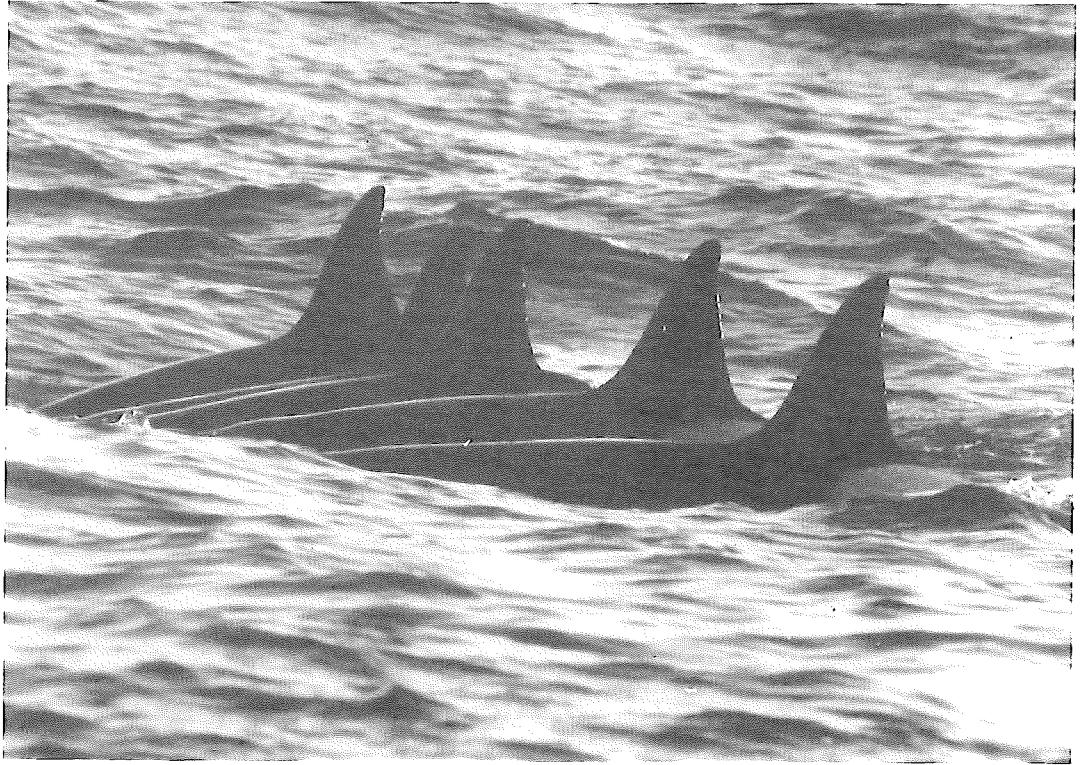


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Preface

Killer whales, Orcinus orca, have long captured the imagination of scientists and laypersons alike. Since about 1973, however, the attention they have received from cetologists has increased dramatically. This is evidenced by the numerous recent publications in scientific and popular journals and two sets of collected papers based on workshops devoted exclusively to this species (Perrin, editor, 1982; Kirkevold and Lockard, editors, 1986). Most of these contributions have dealt with studies in the northeast Pacific (Washington and British Columbia and southern Alaska) and in the Antarctic. Only a few have added information on killer whales of the North Atlantic.

During 1986 and 1987, a group of scientists from nine nations cooperated in „The North Atlantic Killer Whale Project“ to review information available on killer whales of their respective regions and within the topics of their special expertise. The core group of the Project met in Provincetown, Massachusetts, U.S.A., 11 through 14 May 1987, to outline and discuss their findings. This workshop attempted to: 1) describe distribution, movements and numbers of killer whales in the North Atlantic; 2) identify stocks and describe relationships among them; 3) critically evaluate recently completed and ongoing research on this species; 4) promote increased cooperation and exchange of data among researchers working in the same or adjacent geographical areas or disciplines; 5) discuss potential improvements in methods for studying this species; and 6) to suggest geographical areas and topics on which future research on killer whales should focus, particularly in the North Atlantic. The full report of the workshop was prepared by Stephen Leatherwood (Convenor) and Randall R. Reeves (Rapporteur) and submitted (as doc.

SC/39/SM18) to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) for consideration during its meeting in Bournemouth, England, in 1987.

In this special issue of RIT FISKIDEILDAR, entitled North Atlantic Killer Whales, revised versions of 15 of the 25 papers presented at the Provincetown workshop are published. The other 10 were published elsewhere or withdrawn. The issue also includes six papers not presented at the workshop but solicited because they were known to contain information pertinent to the primary goals of the Project. All papers published herein benefitted from anonymous review by at least two qualified experts. It is our hope that this publication promotes an improved understanding of the biology, behaviour and status of killer whales and provides a better basis for rational deliberations concerning the management and conservation of the species in the North Atlantic and elsewhere. We also anticipate that the contributions to this issue will encourage additional work on this species.

On behalf of the participants in the Project and the workshop, the editors wish to thank the following: Sea World, Inc., particularly Dr Lanny H. Cornell, for providing funds to support the North Atlantic Killer Whale Project; the Marine Research Institute (MRI), Reykjavik, in particular Director Jakob Jakobsson, for the generous offer to publish this volume; the referees for their critical reviews and helpful suggestions and comments. We thank all participants of the workshop for the lively and provocative discussions, reflected in the quality of these papers. Kathy Kangas of Hubbs Marine Research Center assisted in all stages of the Project, in her capacity as Leatherwood's assistant, Árni Alfreðsson, Atli Konráðsson

and Sigurður Gunnarsson of the MRI provided various technical assistance during the editing of the volume. Finally, we extend our special thanks to Professor Unnsteinn Stefánsson for his hard and efficient work at all stages

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Reykjavík, December 1988

Jóhann Sigurjónsson

Stephen Leatherwood