

Foraging behavior of transient killer

Robin W. Baird & Pam J. Stacey
International Cetacean Watch Society, Box 1294
Victoria, B.C. V8W 2W3

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Three socially isolated communities of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in British Columbia have been described by Bigg (1982). The transient community is poorly documented in terms of behavior. During an ongoing study of transient killer whale behavior based in Victoria, B.C., observations of predation on harbor seals were made.

Five photographically identified killer whales (Q3, Q7, Q12, Y1, Y2) from two transient pods were observed foraging in Oak Bay, Victoria, on 29 August 1986 around a group of 10 small islets and reefs. An adult male was sighted surfacing with a dead, freshly killed harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*) in its mouth. The prey was not consumed for at least 20 minutes, during which time portions of blubber and viscera came to the surface around the whales. The whales were seen to mill tightly and then individually move backwards out of the group as if tearing apart the seal, possibly indicating sharing of prey. Foraging behavior resumed among the islets with coordinated high speed swimming of all individuals through different channels between the islets. Repeated breaching within five feet of reefs occupied by hauled out harbor seals was seen on several occasions. This behavior may serve to wash or scare prey into the water.

After 40 minutes of apparently unsuccessful foraging, the whales began slow travelling, marked by continued breaching and tail lobbing, away from the islets into Haro Strait. During this time, a seabird was flung approximately 20 feet into the air by a tail lobe and was not seen again after hitting the surface.

Literature Cited

- Bigg, M. A. 1982. An assessment of killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) stocks off Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Report of the International Whaling Commission 32:655-666.