

Song of the Whale: Promoting non-invasive whale research in the 21st century

Historically, our knowledge of whales was based largely on information from whalers, on the behavior of hunted whales and the biology of whales from the study of dead animals. During the 1980s researchers began to investigate ways of studying live whales -- a challenge when whales spend most of their lives underwater, surfacing only to breathe, and sometimes to feed and socialize.

- **IFAW recognized the importance of further developing cost-effective research methods to study whales in the open ocean without harming or disturbing them.** In 1987, IFAW purchased the original *Song of the Whale* (SOTW), a 14 meter auxiliary-powered sailing vessel dedicated to developing and promoting the use of such research methods. Also at this time, a new threat to whales was emerging. Although the International Whaling Commission had agreed to a moratorium on commercial whaling, which came into effect in 1986, by 1987 it was clear that Japan, Norway and Iceland were simply planning to continue whaling by claiming it was for scientific purposes. It was vital to show that much more could be learned from live whales than dead ones.
- **The IFAW research team has continued to develop and refine ground-breaking, non-invasive acoustic and visual methods to study whales and to apply science to immediate conservation needs.** In particular, IFAW has been working on methods to provide more accurate data on the numbers and distribution patterns of cetaceans. The team has developed a specific expertise in the use of passive acoustics, developing automated computerized systems for the detection, tracking and survey of a variety of difficult to study species including sperm whales, harbour porpoises and right whales.
- **IFAW's leading role in the development and championing of non-invasive study techniques is particularly important because, with recent advancements in technology, there is an increasing reliance on the use of techniques such as satellite tagging and biopsy darting, which involve live capture or firing projectiles at the study subject, and which clearly pose some significant risk to the individual animals.** Many of the techniques and equipment developed by the SOTW team are now also used by other researchers world-wide.
- **The threats posed to whales, dolphins and porpoises by human activities make it vitally important for IFAW to continue supporting this kind of research,** as so much is still to be learned about whales in order to better protect them. Research has supported IFAW campaigns to: reduce right whale deaths by ship strikes in the USA, minimize accidental bycatches of porpoises in fisheries in Mexico and Europe, stop scientific whaling in Iceland and designate sanctuaries for whales. In 2004, IFAW launched a new specially-designed, purpose-built *Song of the Whale* – the full-time team will continue to provide independently funded, peer reviewed and internationally respected scientific data to inform the protection of marine mammals and their habitats.

***Song of the Whale*, IFAW's whale research vessel, is a global ambassador for the conservation of whales and marine habitats. The team of experienced sailors, scientists and educators who work on the boat carry out a program of non-invasive scientific research, education and public outreach. The aim is to find practical solutions to conservation challenges, identify new and emerging threats, and encourage effective action to protect marine mammals and their ocean habitats.**

For more information visit IFAW at: www.stopwhaling.org

