



Halting humpback dolphin bycatch: A conservation research & action project focussed on humpback dolphins & mitigating the threat of shark nets

A summary of August – December's activities

2019/12/13

I'm so proud to announce that we have received **funding from The Rufford Foundation**, a well-respected charitable foundation that funds conservation projects that are "pragmatic and will make a substantial and long-lasting impact". They are supporting our proposal **to map the human-wildlife conflict around shark nets** in KZN by identifying the parties involved and garnering their needs and attitudes; and creating a social learning partnership so that the closest stakeholders can share their perspectives so that we can decide together how to go about minimising the conflict. I'm currently in the process of garnering stakeholder needs and attitudes. Recently I interviewed 5 officials from the national department of Environment, plus 4 other stakeholders, bringing the total number of interviews to 29. I am now busy analysing these data qualitatively. Our goal is set to host our first stakeholder meeting in March 2020.

And I am also proud to announce that last night our SouSA Consortium was awarded the Judges' Discretionary Award at the World Marine Mammal Conference. The consortium is made up of 18 members from 13 institutions all studying humpback dolphins (*Sousa plumbea*) along South Africa's coastline. **The award celebrated an important, nation-wide collaboration** to understand the conservation biology of a globally endangered species. The conference was attended by 2500 marine mammal scientists from around the planet.



These past few months have been filled with **networking opportunities**. Our department of Environment hosted an **Integrated Coastal Management lekgotla** (a Tswana word for a consultative process between groups pursuing a common goal). The authorities, the thinkers and the people on the ground gathered to consider progress and challenges at the interface of science-policy-implementation. I learnt a lot about **coastal governance** and the key role players. A month later, I went back to Cape Town to represent the Endangered Wildlife Trust at the inaugural **Southern African Shark Conservation Forum**, organised by the NGO WildOceans. I learnt about the priority conservation actions that are needed, and who is doing what in this sphere. At **The Conservation Symposium** in Howick, I gave two presentations. One offered some preliminary results of the interviews I've conducted. The other related how Reunion is reducing the risk of shark bites. They too cull sharks but more targeted than in KwaZulu-Natal and they release more of the bycatch species (by attending to hooked animals within 2 hours). Also, they are testing non-lethal alternatives with a philosophy of improvement by iteration - something we could hopefully try at Richards Bay. I enjoyed an opportunity to present the whole history of my project to the Endangered Wildlife Trust staff and was invited back to present a shorter

version at **EWT's Conservation Week**. Our National Research Foundation organised a conference "**Systems Analysis and Africa**", pertinent to our project because systems analysis is "a problem-solving process that calls on input from many people and disciplines working alongside different stakeholders and decision makers."

As a member of the **IndoCet Consortium** (a network of cetacean biologists in the Indian Ocean), we contributed photo-identification images of humpback dolphins in Flukebook (Facebook for cetaceans) to explore the development of auto-detection algorithms. We've also shared acoustic data for a regional analysis of humpback whale song structure.

Our team is growing! Natasha Shilubane has accepted a bursary from the National Research Foundation to start her MSc investigating humpback dolphins' acoustics at Richards Bay. We are looking forward to spending 6 weeks in Richards Bay in March 2020 with SouSA Acoustics' PhD candidate Sasha Dines. Also, Emily Higgins, an environmental science communicator from Dalhousie University in Canada has just joined our team and her first task is to draw up a communication plan for us. Welcome to both!

Our citizen science programme is such an important part of our project. Dolphins were reported on 34 occasions, mostly by Judith Leiter who logged 142 hours of survey from her home in the Austrian Alps. In addition, local citizen scientist, Dave Savides spent >80 hours at the Dolphin Viewing Platform where he observed dolphins on 17 occasions, took 90 photographs and talked to hundreds of visitors about humpback dolphins. G'nfin, a dolphin with an amputated fin (pictured on the first page with her calf), was most frequently identified. We were able to use data collected via our webcam in an unexpected way. Humpback whale biologists in East Africa and Madagascar noticed drastic reductions in whale numbers this year and were inquiring about whale observations throughout the southwestern Indian Ocean. We contributed good data collected by Judith.



The **new video camera has worked well**. Nerospec serviced the telecom equipment, many thanks! And thank you to uMhlathuze municipality's Shakes Hiramene, who accommodates the equipment, keeps it clean, and helps out whenever we have a problem. **Hydrophone** news isn't as good. It isn't working and we have had to send it back to NZ. Fingers crossed that we'll have it back soon. Thanks again to our skilled

Citizen Technician Rodger Doust for his ongoing help with the hydrophone and the video equipment.

We launched the boat twice and saw humpback dolphins both times but only got photographs on the second occasions.

We continue to **appreciate the support** of the German Society for Dolphin Conservation, the German Foundation for Marine Conservation, Wits University, Endangered Wildlife Trust and the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board.

Thank you all!

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