

**Report of 22 March 2014 Disentanglement of Gray Whale Calf in
Laguna San Ignacio, B.C.S., Mexico
By Sergio Martínez A.**

During the monitoring of the gray whales carried out by researchers of the Autonomous University of Baja California Sur (UABCS) and the Laguna San Ignacio Ecosystem Science Program (LSIESP) in the lagoon of San Ignacio, BCS. Mexico, on March 17 in the afternoon, we observe a gray whale calf, with a fishing line and a couple of small (aprox. 30 cm) buoys trailing behind the line. On close observation, the line end seemed to be entangled around the right pectoral fin of the whale.



This whale was seen by several eco-tourist whale watching groups that reported the entangled whale to the Biosphere Reserve authorities (PROFEPA). The staff of PROFEPA could not respond because they were occupied with disentanglement of a humpback whale at that time. The researchers requested that if the people that received the disentanglement training at the

January 2014 Workshop training could respond to this entangled whale. On March 20 inspector Sr. Juan Robles of PROFEPA arrived at Laguna San Ignacio and authorized the researchers to attempt to dis-entangle the whale if it was observed again.

On March 21 the researchers obtained the disentanglement equipment from the eco-tourism leaders and carried this equipment in the UABCS panga each day thereafter. It was not possible to obtain large buoys, so new 24 liter gasoline containers and a 20 liter water container were used as alternate "buoys."



On March 22 while working on the lagoon, the eco-tourist guide Sr. Federico Liera Mayoral (an employee of Kuyima Eco-Tourismo) contacted the researchers and informed them the whale, a mother and calf, with the fishing gear on it was observed in the lagoon very close to the location of the researchers.

At approximately 13:45 the researchers approached the calf whale that was entangled with the line and buoys, and using the grappling hook, took ahold of the fishing line and tied on an additional line with the larger buoys to the end of the fishing line. The whale was followed for several minutes and the buoys did not collapse. After three dives by the whale, the researchers approached the whale, and removed and re-attached one buoy to place it closer to the whale without incident. The whale submerged and sank one buoy but not the second.

After a few more dives by the whale, the researchers held onto the trailing line and moved closer to the whale to better observe the tangled line around the whale. When the whale submerged, the line was released, but it was possible to move closer to the whale again each time it surfaced to breathe.



The whale was now pulling the buoys and the researcher's panga and motor, and pulling this heavy weight the whale soon became tired and began to swim more slowly. The tired whale was now spending more time at the surface to breathe.

The researchers could now approach the whale closely and see that the fishing line was wrapped around the whale on both sides of its body, around the right pectoral flipper, and below that the line was "braded" and the fishing buoys trailed behind the whale's tail.



After evaluating the situation, at approximately 14:13 the researchers approached the whale at the surface and cut the trailing line approximately one meter below the whale's mouth and freed the end of the line from the pectoral flipper. The remaining line passed through the mouth of the whale. The researchers did not know how the whale might react to pulling on the line in its

mouth, and rather than pull the line out of the mouth, a second cut was made on the other side to free the remaining line and buoys. The whale submerged with only a short

piece of line in its mouth, no more than a meter on each side of the mouth, and probably not a threat to the life of the whale.

The remaining line and buoys was recovered, including the "braded" portion. Local fishermen commented that this was probably a lobster trap line and floats, as it is common for the surplus line to often be "braded" to shorten the float line when the traps are placed in shallow water.



It should be noted that during the entire disentanglement process the mother whale remained calm and did not react to the panga or the researchers' actions to remove the line and buoys.



Both the mother and calf whales were not seen again during the remaining days of the winter research season (March 23 to April 15, 2014). Photographs of both the mother and calf whale are included in this report in the hope that they are seen again and reported.



Finally the researchers that participated in the disentangling were: Tabata Olavarrieta García, Diana López Arzate, Ludovic Tenorio Hallé, y Sergio Martínez Aguilar who are all with the Programa de Investigación de Mamíferos Marinos (PRIMMA) de la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, under the direction of Dr. Jorge Urbán Ramírez.



Photograph of the right side of the mother whale.



Photograph of the right side of the calf whale.

