

TRANSLATION

Disentanglement of a gray whale calf on February 9, 2022 in Laguna San Ignacio

(RABEN Vizcaino) PRIMMA-UABCS / LSIESP

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February 8, 2022 at 9:00 hrs we received a report of a gray whale that was dragging fishing lines and a buoy. Our Field Chief Sergio Martínez A. led a search for this entangled whale beginning in the northern part of the lagoon and moving south toward the entrance. By 15:00 hrs the whale had not been located, and the search was called off for the day. We asked all the whale-watching boats that were working in the lagoon to inform us if they sighted this entangled whale.

The following day we resumed searching for the whale at 9:00 hrs. Shortly thereafter, we received a report that the whale had been sighted near the entrance of the lagoon (GPS location 26.73245 N and 113.25015 W). After observing the whale for several minutes Dr. Martínez initiated the RABIN protocols to attempt to free the entangled whale from the lines and buoy. The whale was a calf that had blue 3/8-in line wrapped around its mouth, with a 30-cm wide buoy trailing from behind the peduncle and the more than 20 meters of line.

A security line was placed with the help of the grampín (special hook to attach lines) and as the mother and the breeding they were about directing toward away from the lagoon, with the help of the boat we were able to direct the whales toward the north part of the lagoon (toward inside the lagoon) for nearly 10 km and for more than one hour. During this time we attempted to use a method of stopping or slowing the whales by using the weight of the boat to pull on the line known as the “Nantucket Slay-Ride, but the calf reacted by pulling more forcefully, while the mother positioned herself in front to continue to shield the calf from the boats.

Observing this and that it was practically impossible to carry out the liberation with a single boat, at 14:00 hrs we requested additional support of another panga of the company Kuyimá Ec o-Turismo, which within 35 minutes arrived at our location an operator also was previously trained for disentanglement procedures (Alejandro Galicians). Then we developed an action plan, it was to hold the security line from one craft and to come closer to the side of the whales with the second panga for making the cuts of the line around the calf. However, when this was attempted, the whales reacted and by means of the video cameras on the UAV-Drone, we could observe that the mother was protecting the calf by keeping it above her most of the time, protecting it.

We then tried navigating both boats slowly and paralleling the whales, with the whale between both pangas, to cause a distraction of the mother whale a give us an opportunity that the other boat would be able to cut the line around the calf. This yielded a good result, and the first cut in the line on the calf's head released the tension of the line. Soon after attempting a second cut of the line that held the buoy (right side of the animal), apparently the knife instead of cutting, pulled the remaining line, liberating in its entirety the line from the calf. This occurred at 15:12 hrs and at GPS position (26.83376 N and 113.21237 W). We then followed both whales with our UAV-drone for 25 minutes to make sure that there were no more lines on the whale calf.

It is necessary to mention that during the maneuvers and due to pressure of the line, the line pressed into the skin on the head of the calf, and that created two grooved marks where the rope was previously wrapped around the calf. To make the cut of the line, the knife made two superficial cuts in the skin of the animal, which did not appear to be a serious injury to the whale calf.

We recovered the blue line that measured 30 m long, as well as a yellow buoy of 30 cm in diameter.

We want to express our appreciation to all the individuals that provided support and service, and reports of the whales' location, and in remaining with the whales until our RABEN team could arrive. We also thank the Kuyimá company (Alejandro Ramírez Gallegos "Hardy" and Alejandro "Chino" Gallegos), for the support of their boats that enable the completion of this rescue.

Finally, on February 11, 2022 our UAV-drone observed and photographed the mother and calf whales and confirmed that they were alive and swimming normally without any evidence of additional lines on the calf or the mother.

People that participated in the disentanglement of these whales included:

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