

Looking to Conservation Marketing To Strengthen Public Actions For Right Whales



Our goal is to encourage brainstorming how to effectively communicate science based concepts to have an impact on the biggest segments of the public. What you're saying may not be as important as how you're saying it. Those who make personal connections with the public will be most successful.

How does a species become iconic?



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From the public perspective there are a few key species that they identify with, which have become iconic over the years.

In the 60's orcas were being captured for shows in aquaria which got a lot of media attention, including those protesting the captures and shows.

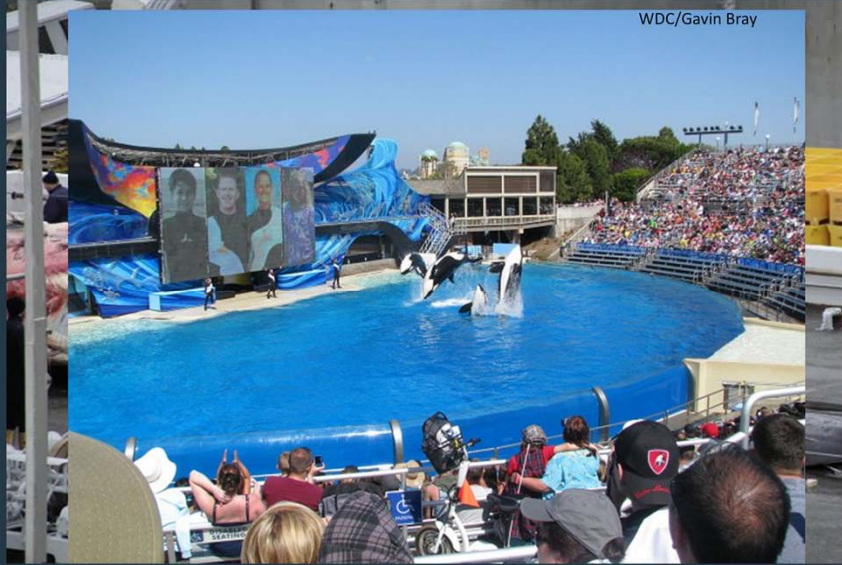
And then of course the Save the Whales movement in the 70's, for which the humpback became an iconic species.

In both of these cases there was a strong public involvement where people felt they could do something and have an impact.

Humpback Source: Stokes built this self-explanatory shape, brainchild of artist [John Perry](#), for the "Save the Whales" movement in the mid-1970s. It's hard to beat a flying sperm whale for grabbing attention, which *Flo* did beautifully in many locales in the '70s, including the '77 (or was it '76?) 'Fiesta. [Here's another shot of Flo](#), in flight, circa 1977 (photo by Dick Stamberg, 𐀀).

<http://www.ballooninghistory.com/stokes/FloInFlight1977.jpg>

Villains



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The other key component for these scenarios was that there were clear villains in each case.

Whaling and captivity are direct threats with intentional consequences to targeted species. They are high profile situations. Anyone who knows the general concept without a lot of details will typically become passionate about the issue and easily “take a side”.

No Villain For Right Whales



EcoHealth Alliance, NOAA permit #594-1759

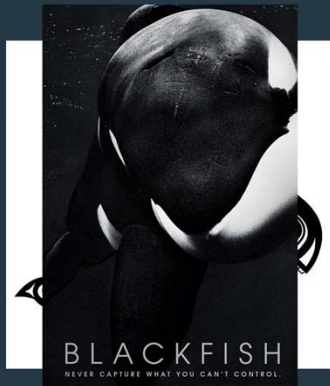


The challenge: no modern-day villain for RW, the threats are unintended consequences of activities from which many humans benefit (fishing and shipping)
Right whales more challenging – along with no bad guy trying to harm them, they are not well known as a species. Need to raise the profile of the species.
The onus is on us as the science and conservation community to increase public awareness and engagement to garner support for saving this species. Doing so is the challenge.
Instead of looking at the standard science and advocacy approaches, we looked at marketing strategies to see if there was a more impactful way to enhance a public connection with right whales.

CHARISMA

There is no sufficient consensus definition

- “charismatic species” is due to pre-existing cultural and aesthetic characteristics, which depend on the human population considered.
- Three key components when related to non-specialist audiences:
detectability / distinctiveness; aesthetics; and functional value.



'I have not slept in days': Readers react to Tahlequah, the mother orca clinging to her dead calf

Originally published August 5, 2018 at 6:00 am | Updated August 7, 2018 at 6:01 pm



An orca pushes her dead calf last week through the waters off the coast near Victoria, B.C. (Michael Weiss / Center for Whale Research via AP)



From a marketing standpoint, species which did well were charismatic, or ambassador species.

Frédéric Ducarme Reviewed 70 papers with charisma as a theme

Orcas have pre-existing cultural characteristics from historic Native totems where orcas symbolize family, longevity and community to popular culture where movies like Free Willy and Blackfish have featured orcas as intelligent and relatable species. Orcas are relatable to humans, as evidenced by the news of Tahlequaha, a grieving mother whose story went viral.

Orcas are aesthetically pleasing with their distinctive black and white markings and easily recognizable dorsal fins – the public has even given them the nickname “sea panda”.

AMBASSADOR SPECIES

4 main characteristics

- large species ✓
- high threat level ✓
- forward facing eyes 🗑️
- and that were potentially threatening to humans 🗑️



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Ewan Macdonald's 2017 paper "Identifying ambassador species for conservation marketing" evaluated 4320 terrestrial mammals for potential ambassador species. Their appeal score was based on these 4 main characteristics, but they also estimated a species' flexibility score. Combined % range overlap with other species along with endangerment and phylogenetic diversity as measures of conservation value. Right whales meet the first 2 of these characteristics, but not the second two.

AMBASSADOR SPECIES

Macdonald et al: "Society's delivery of biodiversity conservation in the future hinges *not only on the expertise and priorities of scientists and policymakers, but also on the support and engagement of numerous stakeholder groups, including the electronically-connected middle classes who tend to be most open to such engagement.*"

"Less than a quarter of the 20 most endangered and evolutionary distinct species in this study were classed as ambassadors, highlighting the need for surrogate species to catalyze conservation effort in areas with such priority species."


Does your organization rely on a surrogate species?



The importance of having ambassador species circles back to gaining public engagement. Global biodiversity mostly due to anthropogenic impacts, therefore requiring significant global action.

CORAL

Coral was born in 1988 to Silver from whom he likely inherited his strong-willed spirit. As a newborn, Coral was attacked by orcas and, like any mother, Silver put herself in harm's way to save him. Fortunately, the only scars that remain are on his flukes. These rake marks, left behind by orca teeth, are now used to identify him. A model son, he is always willing to lend a helping flipper. In 2005, Coral was spotted accompanying an injured right whale who, like his mother, was missing half of her fluke. He comes from a relatively small humpback family as, sadly, his mother died when she became entangled in fishing gear in 1991, leaving Coral with only four siblings. In 2011, he managed to get himself freed from a fishing gear entanglement, just another obstacle this tough whale has overcome.



ADOPT A HUMPBACK

YEAR

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WDC

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For WDC, humpback whales are charismatic and serve as an ambassador species as WDC's humpback adoption program funds the wider work of the organization. Compelling stories of individuals are used to engage supporters. The bios of the adoptable whales are the marketing tool which drive supporter engagement.

Can pairing species make a difference?

**SOUTHERN RESIDENT
ORCA**



Name: *Orcinus orca* (Or-sine-us or-ka)
My friends call me: *killer whale* (I'm not that scary!)
Age: 50-100 years
Build: *I'm built for speed!*
Travel: *California to SE Alaska*
Three things I can't do without:
1. *My family -sappy, I know*
2. *SNACKS! Chinook salmon are my faves*
3. *Quiet time-shhhhh!*
Dislikes: *Dams, pollution, ocean noise*
Causes I support: *Research, education, ecosystem recovery*
Status: *Endangered*

**NORTH ATLANTIC
RIGHT WHALE**



Name: *Eubalena glacialis* (It's Latin! You-ba-layna)
My friends call me: *the Tube!*
Age: *30-50 years, but man do I want to make 80!*
Build: *I'm built for distance not for speed.*
Travel: *Florida to Canada and back*
Three things I can't do without:
1. *Copepods are my jam!*
2. *Constant communication with my friends*
3. *My SAG time*
Dislikes: *vertical lines, noisy ships*
Causes I support: *Disentanglements, climate change, slowing ships*
Status: *Endangered*

Evaluative conditioning

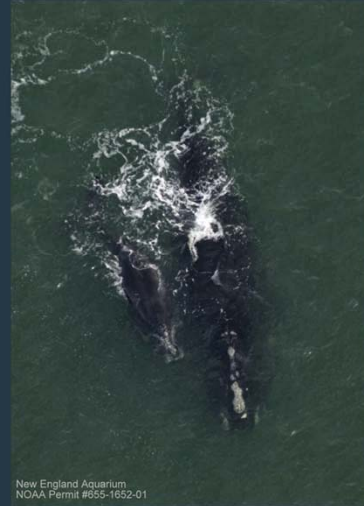
When an initially neutral stimulus (e.g., a face) is paired with another positive stimulus (e.g., a smiling face) or negative stimulus (e.g., a frowning face), people tend to evaluate the initially neutral face differently afterwards. However, pairings also change the assessment of other attributes as well. For example, when an initially neutral person is repeatedly paired with an athletic person or an unathletic person, the neutral person is also rated as more athletic or unathletic, respectively. This phenomenon is called attribute conditioning (AC; Förderer & Unkelbach, 2015).



From research blogs to news headlines, when the public hears about right whales, they are not compelled to connect but when they hear about orcas, it's a different story- they identify with who they are, they relate to the how they feel. Right whale headlines are often bland, not evoking emotions. Of course we don't always have control over the news articles that get posted, but we can't understate the importance of having a captivating headline.

Is Delilah's Family Charismatic?

detectability/distinctiveness; aesthetics; functional value



New England Aquarium
NOAA Permit #855-1652-01

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So, the question is, can right whales be charismatic and is there an individual right whale whose story can be an ambassador for this species? Many years ago WDC built an inflatable whale with high school students based on Delilah's necropsy dimensions. While school kids still are impressed with her size, they perk up and pay attention when we start telling Delilah's story. How is she distinct, how is she aesthetic, what is her functional value?

Is Kingfisher An Ambassador?



When he was just one-year-old, a North Atlantic right whale named Kingfisher became entangled in fishing gear. In a span of six weeks, he went from swimming freely off the coast of Georgia up to Maine, then back down to Georgia all while towing several feet of rope and attached buoys that had wrapped around his right flipper and over his body. Thirteen years later, Kingfisher still lives with his right flipper entangled, where the rope continues to tighten, cutting into flesh and bone, causing chronic injury and pain.



If you say he's probably dead, audience likely to lose interest. More compelling to say he is still swimming and suffering-motivating.

**A picture is worth a thousand words.
A picture with a story is worth 10,000.**

When the disentanglement team last saw Wart in 2010, they were physically and emotionally exhausted from removing gear from this 30-something year old whale. After all, it had taken them six tries over three years to remove the life threatening gear and just days after her disentanglement, she seemed to disappear. One month turned into to six then 12 months then 18 months without seeing her again. Did she survive? It was a surprise phone call on a cold January morning about a mother and calf in Plymouth harbor that changed the ending of this story forever. As if the sighting of a mom and newborn calf right whale in the northeast in January wasn't enough of a cliffhanger, the confirmation that Wart was the mom was a plot twist that no one could have anticipated. Not only did she survive, but this strong and resilient whale was a healthy new mom!

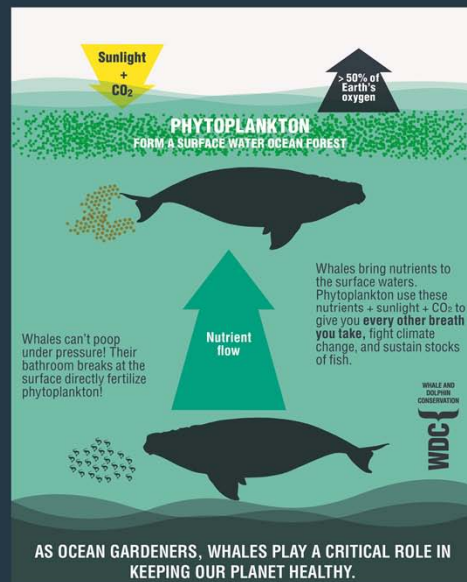


Picture without story enough? Wart and Calf is special – you wouldn't understand the whole story just by looking at photos.

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Answers?

- No simple solutions
- Verissimo et. al: “...it might be the nature of the campaign that was important, as it was framed around the “weirdness” of each flagship...”
- Endangered vs. critically endangered
- functional value and potentially threatening to humans
- “social media and web campaigns are increasingly used as a platform to empower the public to engage in political, conservation, and social issues.”
- Public won't be involved if they don't care



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I don't have answers, but some things to think about:

Maybe weirdness is the right marketing ploy for a species that is not aesthetically pleasing?

In the USA respondents appeared not to differentiate strongly between vulnerable and endangered species, but did show a strong preference for critically endangered species. How is that reconciled with the IUCN red list?

Potential opportunities we're missing

Importance of public involvement



Mass Lobster program launched in 2008 to market lobsters caught using sinking groundline, giving consumers a choice and direct action they can make.

In 2013 we ran a year-long campaign to raise awareness of the plight of NARW which included a petition to make the speed reduction rule permanent. Nearly 75,000 signatures were received and submitted, which made up over half of the comments they received and was instrumental to making the rule permanent.



"In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught." (Baba Dioum, 1968)



Need to explore marketing techniques together because science and advocacy alone isn't getting the job done.

Just because humans have info doesn't mean they will act - Human psychology is a whole other factor and there are experts and resources out there that we can and should be tapping into. Marketing firms who can standardize messaging and reach target audiences
Politicians use SM platforms to spread "fake news"