

Kodiak Researchers Learning More About Whale Migrations

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

In the last 10 years scientists at the Fishery Industrial Technology Center in Kodiak have been reconsidering what they thought they knew about whales. Starting in 1999 they, and other researchers, started to notice that the Pacific Coastal Feeding Group- a name given to a pod of gray whales- wasn't traveling up to the Arctic to feed. Kodiak locals reported seeing whales out-of-season. Researchers wondered what was changing their course. FITC Marine Mammal Specialist Kate Wynne says it was alarming at first.

-- (Whales 1 :19 "They've been seen off of... find enough to feed on."

But then researchers realized that they might not truly know how whales migrate. Wynne says that perhaps current knowledge is based on only part of a cycle. So, instead of thinking that the whales' normal migration pattern was changing, researchers- like Wynne- started to wonder if they really knew the whole story.

-- (Whales 2 :44 "We don't know what's usual...out that way.")

Wynne says
there are a few hypotheses floating around as to why the whales might have
changed their course.

-- (Whales 3 :13 "Temperature
changes... just seeing the back end of a cycle.")

A group of
marine scientists have been monitoring whales around the island via helicopter
for a few years now. Wynne says the data they gather is an important element of
understanding our local ecosystem.

-- (Whales 4 :29 "What
we're using the data for ... humans are in that system as well.")

Wynne says
the scientists at FITC appreciate hearing from the public when they spot a
whale as reports from the public are valuable data in their continued research.

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