Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Olga Titova
Project Title	Population status and potential threats to humpback whales in regions of modern tourism and aboriginal whaling for gray whale in Northern Chukotka, Russia
Application ID	30867-1
Date of this Report	21.04.2022

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To make the first basic descriptions of northern Chukotka feeding aggregations of humpback whales				
• spatial distribution				We conducted both land and boat-based positioning of the feeding humpback whale aggregations.
• interchange with other feeding grounds				We have found few matches of identified whales with two other known feeding grounds in Chukotka and one with Alaska.
• subpopulation affiliation				The comparison with breeding grounds revelled the fully mixture of all subpopulations known for North Pacific, while seeing there the whales belong to Asian stock was surprising.
• seasonal abundance				We catch the earliest arrival of humpbacks in season, and it was substantially later than we expected. Although we couldn't evaluate the size of feeding aggregation due to limited reapproaching to same whales. All evaluations were made from land observations and are very approximate
To explore the mutual distribution of humpback and gray whales and to determine the risks for humpback whales influenced by the movements or hunting efforts of local whalers.				We found only few overlaps in humpback and grey whale distributions, partially due to our effort were biased by dependency on local whalers' sea trips. But we found that because of timing

				of humpback whale arrival and swich of hunting efforts to walruses which are much closer to shore, humpback whale feeding aggregations are rather safe in the region
• To find out the extent of hunting on humpback whales in previous years from osteological analysis of bone dumps				Among 91 whale skulls found in 5 km around Inchoun settlement 84 were of grey whales, seven of bowhead whales and no signs of humpback whale were revealed.
To analyze the archival tracks in the study area (using the archive of the Marine traffic system) following cruise ship movements and to find out whether they are potentially disturbing the feeding whales				Unfortunately, we failed in requesting of vessel traffic archive from marine traffic database, due to their policy in time of current ugly conflict started by our government.
To expand our catalogue of humpback whales to include the waters around Beringia National Park and to establish a basis for multi-year population monitoring. We'll map the critical summer feeding areas and develop proposals for effective environmental protection for Beringia National Park.				We catalogued 30 individual whales new to our catalogue. We presented a detailed scientific report of our work to Beringia National Park
To conduct environmental educational work with the local population in order to increase the level of understanding and responsible attitude to wildlife. We will prepare educational posters and lectures for schools about whale ecology and the importance of their conservation				For all project period we prepared and presented four educational lectures in Inchoun public library, Inchoun school and Lavrentia boarding school. We prepared an informational poster for those lectures, which was given to organisations for their future educational work. Also, some posters were given to Beringia National Park to use at their discretion

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

- The first description of this feeding aggregation was carried out and new scientific information was obtained on the structure of humpback whale population the North Pacific.

- Disturbance to humpback whale feeding aggregation from local marine hunters are largely absent.

- There are no historical signs of hunting for humpback whales, as well as the desire to hunt them at the present time.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

a). The main and unpredictable difficulty of the project was the situation with Covid 19, due to which the state inspector of the Beringia Park dropped out of the project, whose role was to coordinate work on site and provide access to the sea independent of other types of activities. Instead, the work was tied to going out to sea for local hunters, and part of the time was divided between project work and the hunting efforts of the brigade.

b). The second important factor was the late arrival of humpback whales to the observation area. In previous years, whales were observed in large numbers as early as 1st September; in 2021 they appeared no earlier than September 16th. Because of this, the deadline for the field stage of the project was extended by a month, until October 12th.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

The lecturers were enthusiastic and asked questions about the biology of marine mammals. Given the rarity of such events, interest arose, but for a greater educational effect, a longer programme covering more topics and more familiar to people should have been made. The community of sea hunters did not participate in educational programmes but their children were more active listeners than others.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

We are thinking of continuing research on humpback whale feeding aggregations further west along northern Chukotka, although this is difficult to plan given the current political situation in our country.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

I am currently negotiating with copyright holders of humpback whale breeding site catalogues to plan a joint publication in a peer reviewed journal.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

According to local people communication, the humpback whales come to the northern coast of Chukotka twice during the summer and possibly move along the coast twice during the feeding season. This situation is generally not typical for the behaviour of humpback whales in their feeding grounds and may be associated with active expansion into Arctic habitats associated with climate change. Therefore, for the next steps, we would plan to conduct longer observations in the area of other, more western settlements in the north of Chukotka. However, given the problems encountered at this stage, we suggest more independent planning, for example, including your own boat driver in the team, so that we could only rent a boat from the local people.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, Rufford Foundation logo is used on the poster presented at the educational lectures.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Olga Titova - observations, lectures and data processing

Igor Bobyr - coordination of interaction with the local people, assistance in logistics.

Evgeny Svsiv – dropped out of the project due to Covid 19

10. Any other comments?

Much of this project did not go according to plan, and less data was collected than was possible and less than I expected. However, a start has been made to research on humpback whales in the deep Arctic. We have achieved, albeit not fully, our goals. And most importantly, we got a real idea of how observations should be organised in this area and an understanding emerged of what other work would be valuable to carry out.