

LATEXTRA

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ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

SIGHTINGS ARE NO FLUKE: A blue whale begins a dive off the coast of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Abundant krill has attracted the migrating whales to the waters near the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

NO SIGN JACKSON DRUGGED HIMSELF

Fingerprint found on a syringe from the death scene belonged to a coroner's investigator.

VICTORIA KIM, HARRIET RYAN AND ANDREW BLANKSTEIN

Michael Jackson's fingerprints were not on any of the syringes, vials or other medical paraphernalia that littered the scene of his death.

Blue whales dine in treacherous waters

Endangered mammals, increasingly feeding near shipping lanes, are at risk of being hit and killed

TONY BARBOZA

The waters near the nation's largest port complex have become a bustling feeding ground for increasing numbers of blue whales, putting the endangered animals at greater risk of being hit and killed by the enormous ships moving in and out of the harbor, according to researchers who've been tracking them for nearly two years.

The whales, which migrate along the coast of California and are regularly spotted from May to December, are congregating in such numbers in the midst of this virtual freeway of ship traffic that the

spot has become "the area of densest concentration close to shore in all of California," said research scientist John Calambokidis.

Daily appearances by the world's largest animal feeding along an underwater drop-off outside Los Angeles Harbor have been a huge draw for sightseers. But the underwater buffet of krill, the shrimp-like crustaceans the whales feast on, is in the path of a major shipping lane and puts them in danger of being hit and killed by vessels leaving the port.

"While this is a unique and exciting opportunity to have these animals out here, it also puts [See Whales, AA5]

Panel discovers prostate

A U.S. task force reportedly will urge men to forgo routine PSA cancer screening

SHARI ROAN AND ERYN BROWN

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is set to recommend that middle-aged men skip routine screening for prostate cancer, according to reports circulated Thursday.

The task force, which is part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is scheduled to issue its recommendations Tuesday, according to the *Stat* magazine. The Prostate Cancer Foundation, a New York Times weekly newsletter known as the Cancer Letter reported Thursday that the task force would change its position on the widely used PSA test to recommend that men under age 75 forgo it.

The chairwoman of the task force, Dr. Virginia Moyer of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, was not reached for comment Thursday.

Such a change would be controversial. Although the results of clinical studies have raised questions about the benefits of the test, doctors maintain that it is valuable.

"That would be a ve-

LAUSD to retake the reins at school

HOWARD BLUME

Los Angeles sch

Whales swim in busy waters off L.A.

[Whales, from AA1] them at great risk," said Calambokidis, co-founder of the Olympia, Wash.-based Cascadia Research Collective.

Over the last decade, dozens of whales off the California coast have been injured or killed by ships, and scientists think the slowly recovering population of about 2,500 West Coast blue whales is especially vulnerable.

Four blue whales were struck and killed by vessels in 2007 near the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of Santa Barbara, raising the alarm of federal wildlife officials, who now monitor the whales from the air and use their coordinates to issue notices asking freighters to voluntarily slow down.

With the increase in blue whales near the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex, Calambokidis said, "now we're worried about here."

For two years, Calambokidis has headed the project to photograph, tag and keep tabs on whales that feed near the shipping lanes. Interns for the Aquarium of the Pacific accompany tourists aboard twice-a-day whale watching trips by Harbor Breeze Cruises to photograph and mark coordinates of the few dozen blue whales that have taken to grazing about 5 miles off the Los Angeles coast.

As part of the ongoing work, researchers in an inflatable motorboat approach a whale and use a long pole to press a shoe-sized tracking device equipped with a suction cup to its back as it surfaces. The bright orange transmitters are designed to fall off after less than 24 hours.

An 80-foot whale whose tag was scooped from the ocean Tuesday is a regular visitor that has been in the area for about a month.

When researchers tagged the same whale a week be-



BEAUTY IN PERIL: A two-year study has found that endangered blue whales are congregating in rich feeding grounds near Long Beach and Los Angeles. But those waters can be dangerous to the world's largest animal because of heavy shipping traffic.

Tracking a blue whale

The path of a blue whale outfitted with a tracking device shows it spending much of a day in late September feeding near shipping lanes before swimming north.



Sources: Cascadia Research Collective, ESRI, TeleAtlas

LORRAINE WANG Los Angeles Times

fore, they downloaded data that revealed a typical behavior pattern. The animal spent most of the day just outside the port, diving as deep as 1,000 feet. After dark, it stayed near the surface, perhaps to rest, and swam to the Santa Monica Bay. The tag was eventually recovered in the South Bay.

The GPS tracking device records the whale's coordinates each time it surfaces, measures how deep it dives and how it reacts to passing ships. Some are equipped with acoustic sensors that record the animals' low-frequency calls and the rumble of passing freighters.

The information collected so far has uncovered a

disturbing pattern: At night, the whales spend twice as much time lingering near the surface, where they are most vulnerable to being hit by ships. And they show no sign of trying to avoid approaching container ships.

For reasons that are not yet understood, the whales often draw closer to the vessels, increasing the odds of a collision.

A better understanding of the whales' behavior in busy waters could help authorities decide how to separate them from ship traffic. Ocean carriers are backing a proposal to alter shipping routes to avoid whale feeding grounds, while conserva-



GETTING CLOSER: John Calambokidis directs David Christopher, toward a tag that had gathered data on whale behavior.

tion groups have petitioned the Obama administration for a speed limit through California's national marine sanctuaries.

Later during the research trip on Tuesday, Calambokidis spotted a group of whales surfacing to breathe as a fully loaded cargo ship cruised by. "These whales are in the out-

bound shipping lane," said. Among them was a regular — the same whale they had just retrieved the tracking device from. He could recognize the individual by its skinny dorsal fin and its unique pattern of dark blotches, markings that are like fingerprints but even more detailed.

It's not surprising that

Gov. signs more than 30 bills

[Legislation, from AA1] nificant deterrent for people thinking about smuggling phones in."

Brown also signed an executive order Thursday

"To me, it's the height of irresponsibility to eliminate protections against fraud when we are laying off teachers and running record budget deficits."

maintain and pay for health coverage while women are on maternity leave, under SB 299 by Sen. Noreen Evans (D-Santa Rosa).

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Photographs by ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

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Cascadia Research Collective, ESRI, TeleAtlas

LORRAINE WANG Los Angeles Times

They downloaded data and revealed a typical behavior pattern. The animal spent most of the day just north of the port, diving as deep as 1,000 feet. After dark, it surfaced near the surface, resting, and swam to Santa Monica Bay. The whale eventually recovered in South Bay. A GPS tracking device revealed the whale's coordinates each time it surfaced, how deep it dives, and how it reacts to passing ships. Some are equipped with acoustic sensors that detect the animals' low-frequency calls and the rumble of passing freighters. The information collected so far has uncovered a

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It's not surprising the

abundant food has the creature coming back again and again.

"They're constantly in this mode of looking for a place to feed," Calambokidis said. "So when they find a patch of prey, they stick around for a while."

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