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Marine Spatial Planning: Mapping historical whale sightings to manage the future!

This blog post was written by Veronica Frans, research assistant at SAERI in the Darwin Plus-funded project 'Marine Spatial Planning for the Falkland Islands' team. The Environmental Planning Department financially supported the study via their Environmental Studies Budget. An edited version of this blog post was published in the [Penguin News](#) on 29 April 2016.

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Last year in October, a blog post (Marine Spatial planning mapping historical whale sightings to help manage the future) was written about the Marine Spatial Planning team's efforts to capture the story of whale recovery in the Falkland Islands' waters. I travelled all around the Islands, interviewing people about where and when they had seen whales throughout their lifetime, and if they could recall a difference between the numbers they saw in the past and what they see today. I also went through museum archives, government and whaling records, old newspapers, Falklands Conservation reports and scientific publications. The results are finally in and it seems that indeed, a story can be told!

Interviewee accounts have indicated that many whales were often or always seen in the Falkland Islands' waters in the 1940s and 50s, but in the 60s and 70s, there were very few to virtually no observations. Commercial whaling ended worldwide in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, the number of observations has increased and skyrocketed for the 2010s, since we still have half a decade left to go! The older generations could recall having seen whales in their childhood, but noticed their absence and recent return; most interviewees representing the younger generation, however, had stated that they did not recall seeing their first whale until adulthood.

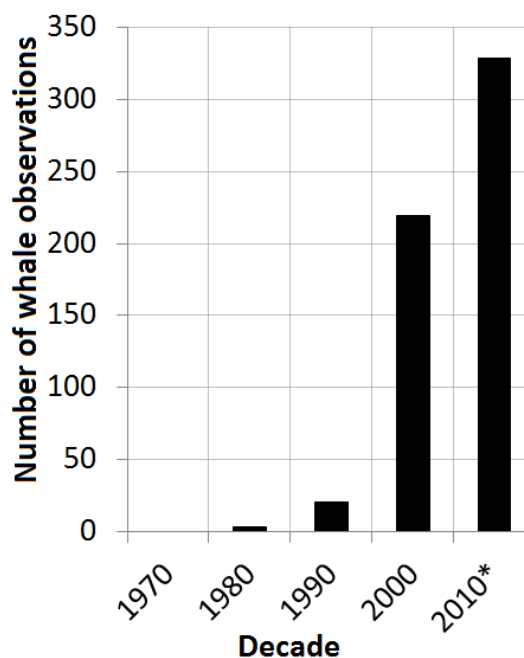
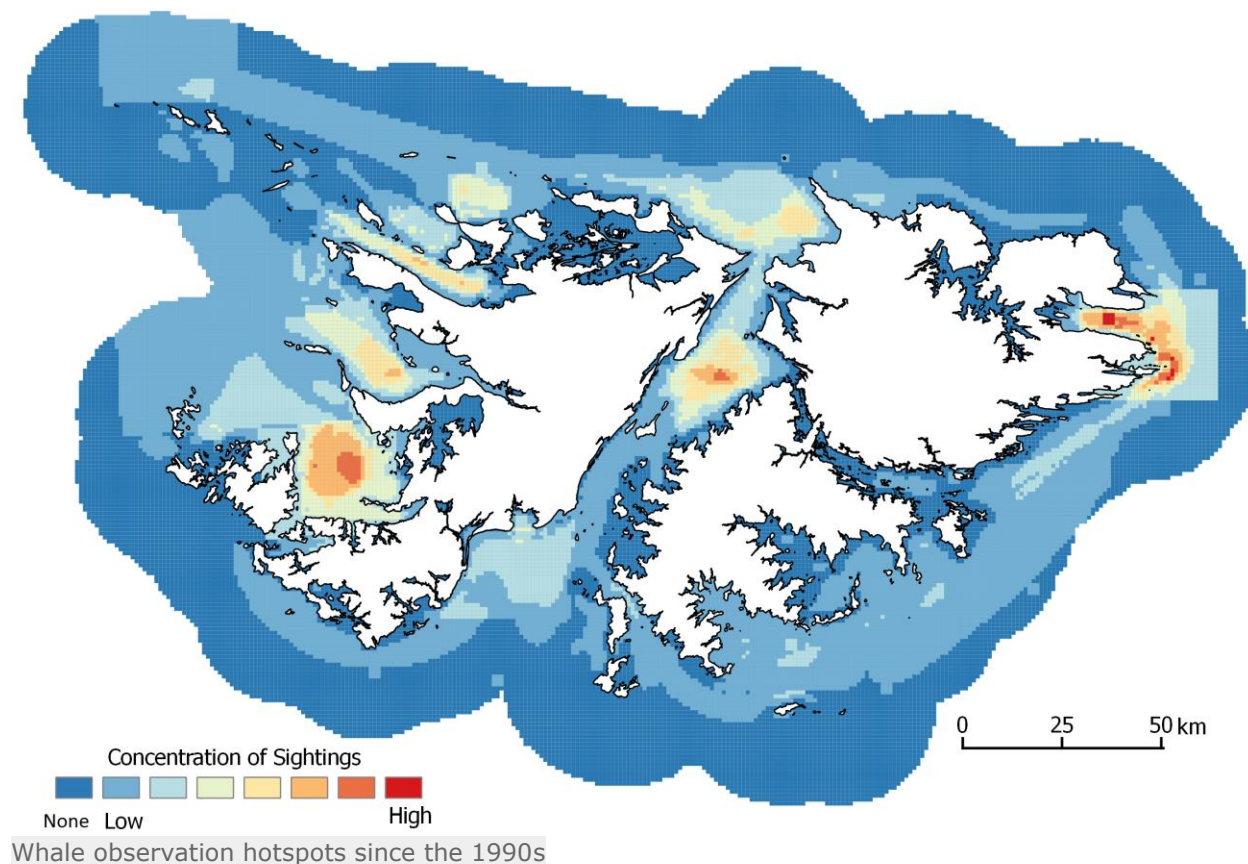


Image right: Increase in whale sightings since the 1970s when none were seen

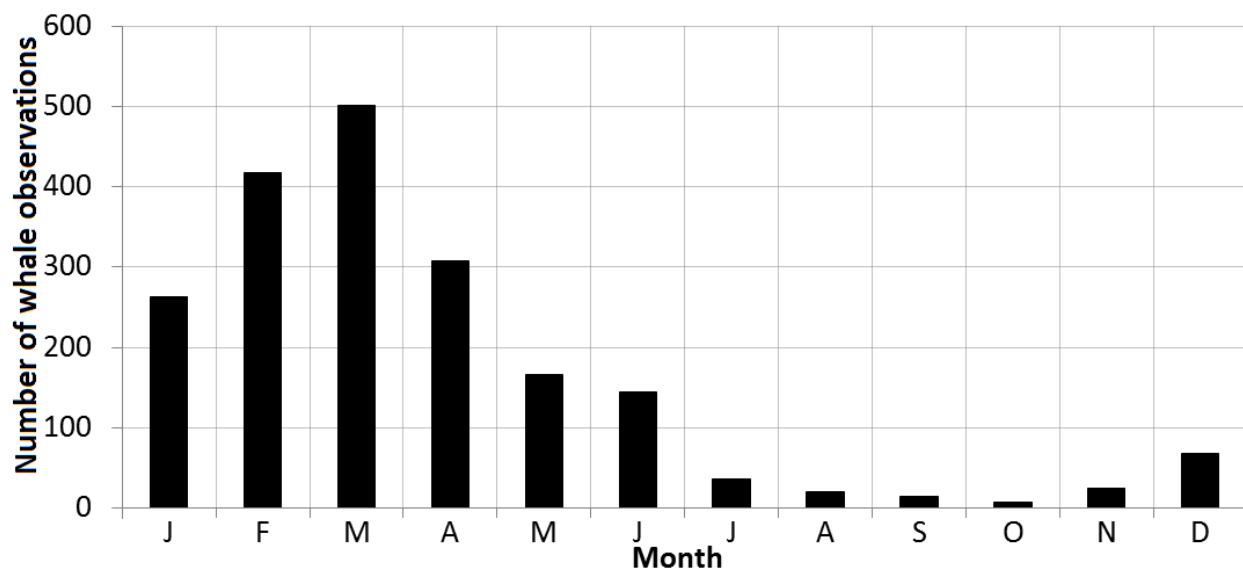
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The majority of whales seen in the Falkland Islands’ inshore waters are Sei whales, followed by Fin whales, Minke whales, Southern right whales and Humpback whales. Sighting hotspots were found, with the highest concentrations in Berkeley Sound, Falkland Sound and the large bays of West Falkland.



One interviewee described the increase in whale sightings as an “explosion of whales” and others stated that they were “glad to see they’re back and [they] like seeing them”. To many of the local residents, the return of the whales in the Falklands’ waters may be obvious, but we now have data to study the recovery and tell the story to the rest of the world. Locally, the findings from this study can be used in Marine Spatial Planning by informing FIG on potentially important areas for the whales, and when they are most likely to be present in these waters.

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Peak of whale sightings: January to March each year

I and the rest of the Marine Spatial Planning team thank all participants again for their contribution, as well as those who provided other useful sources of information for this study.