

Transient Orcas on August 17th

On Sunday August 17th there were approximately 20 Transients travelling between Active Pass (eight miles north) to Tumbo Island. This included T100s, T101s, T102s, T124s, T20, T90 and T90B (calf). The same travel patterns in the same locations were also recorded on Monday and Tuesday. This type of repeated transient travel patterns were also observed in 2007.

The behaviours of transients are similar to residents. They breach, head view, tail slap, pectoral slap, speed swim and more while they socialize, play, rest, forage and travel. The primary “lifestyle” difference is their choice of food that includes marine mammals such as seals and porpoises. While their prey is quite different than salmon the hunting strategies have similarities such as group herding and circling (see Transient Orca Behaviours below).

These transients were continuously pursued and harassed by commercial whale watch boats and some pleasure craft. Several Canadian operators repeatedly approached within 100 yards and blocked their pathways. One Vancouver operator tried to get in front of two orcas and pursued them within 100 yards them when they changed directions. Another Steveston operator “positioned” in front of approaching Ts and when the orcas slowed down to socialize he drove at them.



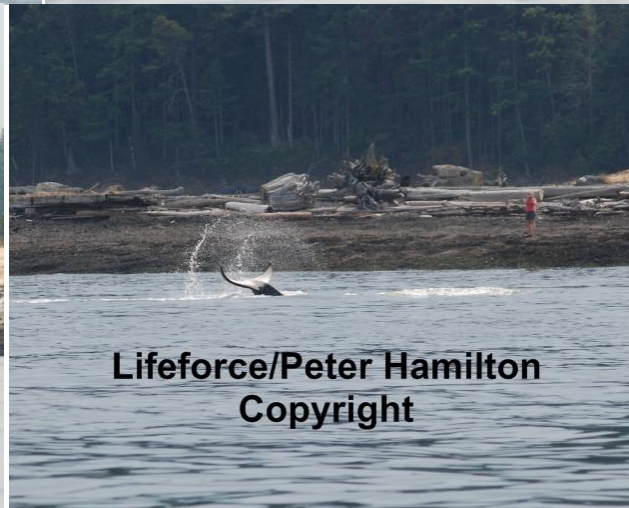
Whale Watch Company following orcas in violation of the 100 yards “No Go Zone”.

On Tuesday, August 19th I heard that the majority of these same orcas were in the same area. At 1530 one operator asked another “Are there different rules up here (Canada)?” The response was “No” and that all operators should be “giving transient a bit more space.” Obviously they were seeing the same illegal acts that I witnessed on the 17th. At 1550 one Steveston operator said that it looked like T124 had enough of them because he was speeding away.

On Monday, August 18th, one operator suggested that if they stay on side of the orcas they may be able to push them back into shore. Fortunately another operator said it should be left up to the orcas to decide.

Lifeforce will be preparing a report “In Pursuit of Orcas” to lobby government to provide more funding for enforcement by the responsible government agencies. Most Whale Watch Companies harass orcas when they are not monitored. Pleasure boats mimic their illegal operating methods. If approached they say they were just doing what the companies were doing. Non-government organizations, such as Lifeforce’s Lifewatch Boater Awareness Program and Soundwatch, have tried to raise awareness of responsible boating but have not been able to convince the tour companies to always follow the rules. There has been some successes in the San Juan Islands with volunteer No Boat Zones and better enforcement but after a two year absence on the water Lifeforce has found the situation as worse as ever. There is a flagrant disregard for the orcas’ safety and laws. It is time for major improvement in the whale watching industry. Fines and other penalties are needed to get boats to back off.

Transient Orca Behaviours





For Freedom,

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