



## Making a Whale of a difference...

**WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY (OR TWO OR THREE) MAKES!** As of this writing, it's snowing at the crest of the 154 highway in the mountains above Santa Barbara. Due to heavy snowfall, all traffic, including commercial vehicles, are being guided over the Grapevine into California's central valley. Say ... *what?* Wasn't it just last week that we were basking 80 degree summer weather along Butterfly Beach's mini strand? In my confusion, I decided to view the coastline myself, to see if what I'd heard was really true. And, indeed it was! Butterfly Beach was almost vacant and the freezing air demanded a quick run back to my car and home.

With limited opportunities for nautical and harbor related activities during this unusual weather, the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum's excellent website, featuring a huge library of interesting lectures on the Santa Barbara Channel and ocean related issues, was my next (much warmer!) stop. Didn't take too long to find a fascinating lecture by Sean Hastings, project manager of NOAA's Channel Island National Marine Sanctuary, whose mission it is to monitor the uses of the Marine Sanctuary and to protect Blue whales – and others – from being killed in the shipping lanes between the Santa Barbara coastline and the Channel Islands.

In presenting his lecture titled *Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies*, Hastings reminded his audience that whaling is a centuries old industry and was a source of income for a host of countries. Whales who found their home in the oceans of the world previously numbered in the hundreds of thousands; however, as a result of whaling, the Blue Whale population was reduced to a mere 2,000 before the last whaling station closed in 1972. Since that time, their population has continued to increase and the Santa Barbara Channel is their summer feeding ground. Currently, Blue Whale



Photo courtesy of NOAA

Blue Whale - *Balaenoptera musculus*

populations are the most threatened of the whale populations, as they haven't learned to avoid collisions with passing ships.

The shipping lanes between Los Angeles and other commercial harbors of California are the highways for cargo ships carrying goods essential for our global economy. The Santa Barbara Channel has evolved into a shared space between the natural and commercial worlds. Hastings reported that the work of the Channel Island Marine Sanctuary facilitated a shifting of established commercial lanes to better accommodate both whales and shipping.

Additionally, the Sanctuary brought private industry to the table to curtail the speed of its ships - 12 to 10 knots - as they navigate through the Channel. Although a government agency, NOAA has accomplished this through negotiations rather than regulations. A model established by the Los Angeles harbor was adapted using financial incentives to encourage ships to lower speeds, protecting themselves as well as the whales. And, it offered an additional benefit for those of us who live on the land.

The 'Blue Sky' element of Hastings' talk included creating cleaner air over both the ocean and on land. "Did you know," Hastings asked his audience, "that Santa Barbara does not meet the minimum air quality standards?" The burning of fossil fuel by cargo ships offshore translates into polluted air onshore. Lowering the speed of a ship, much the same as a car, requires less fuel and creates fewer toxins in the atmosphere. The standards established by the Marine Sanctuary are mutually beneficial for both our environment and commerce and continue to be a work in progress to this day.

Yet the Blue Whale continues to need protection. At almost 100 feet long and 90 to 100 tons in weight, the whale is a massive mammal. If washed ashore, disposal is always an issue, as many can attest. It's certainly a reminder that commercial needs and the natural environment require continuing compromise, whether it be in the ocean or on land. Hastings' talk certainly brought this to my attention. Respecting Mother Nature's balance is important for the survival of the planet and those of us who make it our home. Speaking of Mother Nature, let's see what she has in store for us at the end of this rainy week. *Stay tuned...*

**Sigrid Toye** volunteers for the *Breakwater Flag Project*. She is on the board of directors of the Maritime Museum and participates in Yacht Club activities. An educational/behavior therapist, Sigrid holds a Ph.D in clinical psychology. She loves all things creative, including her two grown children who are working artists. Send Harbor tips to: [Itssigrid@gmail.com](mailto:Itssigrid@gmail.com)



Photo by Sigrid Toye