Whale watching donation

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia purchased a small caravan that each year will be based at the Cape Solander Whale Watching Platform at Kurnell for use by the team of volunteers who work on the Cape Solander Whale Migration Study that is being carried out on the coastline of the Botany Bay National Park, Sydney. The study takes place during June-July each year. In previous years the volunteers have hired a caravan but in 2005 they did not have sufficient funds and approached our Society for help.

Wayne Reynolds, whale watching volunteer, Patrick Medway, and Vanessa Wilson, National Parks Ranger in charge of the volunteers at the hand over of the donation of the caravan

The volunteers work seven days a week keeping a vigil from dawn to dusk recording whale numbers. They brave the winter weather to provide scientists and researchers with invaluable written and photographic records of the migrating whales along our coastline. Humpback, minke, southern right and pygmy killer whales have all been seen, as well as an extremely rare blue whale. On the busiest days, more than 40 humpback whales can be seen, and last year nearly 1,000 whales were spotted off Cape Solander. The volunteers also record large numbers of dolphins passing the Cape.

Our Society is delighted to provide the caravan during this period to enable the volunteers to have some small comforts during their long hours of research. The Society's caravan will be used throughout the rest of the year for displays and exhibitions to promote the work of the Society and our role in conserving Australia's precious fauna and flora.

Wayne Reynolds – winner of the Serventy Conservation Award for 2004

Wayne has an inspirational love for Australia's wildlife and has been responsible for the success of the Cape Solander Whale Migration. He was the original volunteer for this project twelve years ago when he began his 84-hour weeks, braving the winter weather to record and study one of the great animal migrations along our coastline. His enthusiasm gradually spread throughout the community and now thousands of visitors come to the site every winter to study, watch and learn about the migrating whales.

Wayne used his cash award from our Society to purchase of new photographic equipment. He now has an 8.2 Megapixel Canon digital SLR and a Canon 100 to 400mm 5.6 image stabilised automatic focus lens which will be used for identification of individual whales from boats in any weather conditions. Below are a few photos that Wayne took from Cape Solander.

Whale watching

Whale watching at Cape Solander is an experience to remember as visitors can witness the migration of the majestic humpback whales along the East Coast, which occurs from June to mid November. To see a humpback whale lift its massive body into the air, or slap the sea surface with its long fins, is a breathtaking sight and a special privilege.

Each year most of the large whales in the southern hemisphere follow a general migration pattern. Summer is spent in the cold waters of Antarctica, where they feed on enormous quantities of the prawn-like krill. In autumn, as the temperature falls and ice begins to form on the sea surface, the whales begin their northward migration to more temperate, sub-tropical and, in some species, tropical waters to give birth and to mate before returning to Antarctic waters at the end of spring.

Tips for whale watching

- Take a good pair of binoculars
- Choose clear, calm days in June through to October
- Select a prominent headland
- Look for the blow of a whale - that is the cloud of spray or mist that appears as the air is exhaled through the blowhole. This is usually how whales are first seen

Australia has become a world leader in the protection and conservation of whales since the end of Australia's whaling industry in 1978. Australian waters are home to 43 species of whales and dolphins. The protection of these species at domestic, regional and international levels is a priority for the Australian Government. Although they are protected in Australian waters, whales and dolphins are still threatened by human activities.

Whale protection, strandings, entanglements and the growing interest in whale watching are major areas of focus for Australia's whale conservation initiatives. Initiatives are also being developed to address other factors affecting whale conservation, including lack of knowledge concerning population, abundance and distribution of cetacean species, habitat degradation, climatic change, and whaling by some countries.

The Australian Whale Sanctuary

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) all cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) are protected in Australian waters:

- The Sanctuary includes all Commonwealth waters from the 3 nautical mile state waters limit out to the boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone (i.e. out to 200 nautical miles and further in some places)
- Within the Sanctuary it is an offence to kill, injure or interfere with a cetacean. Severe penalties apply to anyone convicted of such offences
- All states and territories also protect whales and dolphins within their waters

Five whale species are currently listed as nationally threatened by the Australian Government:

- Blue Whale (Endangered)
- Southern Right Whale (Endangered)
- Sei Whale (Vulnerable)
- Fin Whale (Vulnerable)
- Humpback Whale (Vulnerable)

Recovery Plans for Threatened Species

Recovery plans for the five threatened great whale species have recently been developed. The recovery plans identify whaling and habitat degradation as key threats to whales, and establish a range of programs to ensure the ongoing recovery of the species. Satellite monitoring is a key action identified in the recovery plans and will improve knowledge of whale movements and migratory pathways, and help protect important habitats. The recovery plans for these five species will be in force until 2010.

Our Society is actively supporting the Australian Government's whale conservation programme.