

PREFACE

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) is proud to present the latest volume of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications series. Volume 11 *Sighting Surveys in the North Atlantic: 30 years of counting whales* is a collection of papers edited by Geneviève Desportes, Rikke Guldborg Hansen and Daniel G. Pike.

NAMMCO is an intergovernmental organisation with a mandate to provide management advice on cetaceans and pinnipeds in the North Atlantic to ensure the sustainable and responsible use of living marine resources. The NAMMCO Scientific Publications series aims to make available in peer-reviewed and published form the scientific work that forms an important foundation for the generation of management advice. Furthermore, the series has a particular focus on publishing work that despite its central importance for assessment and management, can be difficult to publish in other academic journals due to its apparent routine nature or lack of novelty (such as wildlife monitoring work). One of the essential requirements for the provision of management advice on different marine mammal species is an estimate of their abundance, and ideally, a range of abundance estimates generated over time to allow for the determination of a trend.

Trends in distribution and abundance for cetaceans are required to understand anthropogenic impacts, something that is essential for conservation and management in a time of profound climate, environmental and societal changes. The North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) series therefore constitutes a fundamental source of information for NAMMCO and has been a flagship effort in its endeavour to provide sound management advice for human activities impacting cetaceans. The NASS are perhaps the largest-scale wildlife surveys ever attempted, with the T-NASS 2007 achieving a transatlantic coverage. The increasingly coordinated and internationally aligned surveys, including with other concurrent European and North American surveys, have contributed to estimations of cetacean abundance at an oceanic basin scale.

Volume 7 of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications, *North Atlantic Sighting Surveys: Counting whales in the North Atlantic 1987-2001*, primarily presented the results of the first 4 NASS (1987, 1989, 1995 and 2001). Volume 11 deals with the results of the next 2 NASS (2007 and 2015), the associated Norwegian mosaic surveys (2002–2007, 2008–2013, 2014–2018), and the Canadian High Arctic Cetacean Survey (2013). This volume provides survey specific results as well as 30-year trends of abundance for several species. The majority of the analyses and results presented here have been reviewed and endorsed by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee.

Abundance estimation for non-target and non-exploited species have often had a low priority since they were not required for formulating management policies and decisions. This meant that a wealth of data from the surveys has not previously been published or even analysed. At its 24th meeting, the NAMMCO Scientific Committee decided to support the analysis of all the remaining data from the NASS series that could be used for estimating abundance.

The publication of this volume means that all sightings data of the 1987–2015 NASS series have now, finally, been analysed and published. This is indeed a milestone. In spanning 30 years of counting whales, some of the then young scientists involved in the first NASS in 1987 have climbed up the ladder from observer, to cruise leader and/or survey coordinator, and are now entering retirement. Therefore, the publication of this volume really marks the end of an epoch!

Cetacean sightings surveys (in their organization, execution and data analysis) represent a niche area in conservation biology. Analysing the information collected from a survey to arrive at an abundance estimate requires a particular set of skills and abilities, encompassing both statistical and modelling competence, a comprehension of the constraints inherent to surveys, and an understanding of cetacean behaviour. The specialized knowledge required inevitably means that both the number of people engaged in this work and the network capable of providing expert peer-review is limited (as is arguably true for many scientific fields). Readers may therefore notice that both the editors of the volume and the authors of the different papers are in some cases involved in several pieces of the published work. Aware of the small community of expertise in cetacean surveys and abundance estimation, the editors have discussed potential conflicts of interest and worked hard to follow the guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for peer review.

Given how crucial abundance estimates are for species and ecosystem assessments and management decision-making, we certainly hope to see cetacean sighting surveys continue and the network of international scientists working in the field grow over the next 30 years. To be sustainable, it is also particularly important that young scholars take an active interest and role in this field in the years to come.

We would like to thank all of the contributing authors and reviewers for making this volume possible, as well as all the funding bodies, scientists, technicians and ship's crew that make sighting surveys and their analyses possible. Additional thanks go to Solveig Enoksen and Mana Tugend who assisted with the formatting and copy-editing of the articles during their time at the NAMMCO Secretariat.

Further information about NAMMCO is available at www.nammco.org. All of the volumes in the NAMMCO Scientific Publications series are available in electronic form at <https://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/NAMMCOESP> with some volumes also available in hard copy through contacting the NAMMCO Secretariat.

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