

GRAY WHALE STUDY ISSUES CAUTION DUE TO OIL, GAS ACTIVITY

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Gray whales currently only can be found in the Pacific Ocean. As a result, the population of gray whales has reduced to 4,000 whales. In the early 1970s scientists predicted that gray whales would disappear completely. A group of these animals was accidentally found at the coast of Sakhalin.

Specialists learned that the northeast coast of Sakhalin was the only place where gray whales come to feed. They swim slowly and need to have a protected bay for reproduction. There are a lot of these types of bays on the east coast of Sakhalin, such as the Piltun Bay where the largest number of whales gather to feed each year. There they can find all necessary organisms for feeding. A group of Russian and US scientists have been studying these whales for seven years.

The group members, Alexander Burdin and Robert Brownell, say the situation around whales is crucial. During their study they have managed to find only about a hundred whales. The scientists thoroughly studied all the whales found on Sakhalin using biopsies. A small piece of whale skin is taken with the help of an arrow with a special head. Even though this piece of skin is much smaller than one-ruble coin, it is a valuable source of information about whales. It identifies information about a whale's sex, age, and genetic roots.

Having completed their study along the coast of Sakhalin, the scientists reached disappointing conclusions. Industrial noise leads to exhaustion of gray whales. This is clearly seen in the photos in which you can see the shoulder-blades and cervical vertebrae of the exhausted whales, which happens because the whales go for places to avoid the industrial noise but there is not enough food for them. The oil industry is threatening the existence of the gray and leading to a decrease in the number of these rare animals. According to the scientists, the only solution is to establish close cooperation between government, scientists, and the oil and gas companies. It is necessary to develop an international plan to protect the gray whales. It is a well-known fact that they come to the Sea of Okhotsk only to feed. But they spend the rest of their life in waters of other countries.

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