Photo-identification Catalogue and Status of the Northern Resident Killer Whale Population in 2014.

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ABSTRACT

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Field studies of the life history and ecology of killer whale populations off Canada's west coast have been conducted annually since 1973. These studies are based on the identification of individual whales from photographs of permanent, natural markings. In this report, we summarize abundance trends in the northern resident killer whale population between 1974 and 2014, and provide an updated photo-identification catalogue of individuals. In 2014, the northern resident population was composed of 290 whales. The population has grown at an average mean annual rate of 2.2% since 1974. Continued population monitoring by photo-identification is a key research activity in the recovery strategy for this threatened population.

RÉSUMÉ

Towers, J. R., Ellis, G. M. et Ford, J. K. B. 2015. Catalogue de photographies d'identification et état de la population d'épaulards résidents du nord en 2014. Rapp. tech. can. sci. halieut. aquat. 3139: iv + 75 p.

Depuis 1973, des études sur le terrain sont menées chaque année afin d'observer le cycle de vie et les caractéristiques écologiques des populations d'épaulards qui vivent le long de la côte ouest du Canada. Ces études reposent sur l'identification d'individus à partir de photographies de leurs marques naturelles permanentes. Dans le présent rapport, nous présentons la courbe évolutive de la population d'épaulards résidents du nord de 1974 à 2014, ainsi qu'une mise à jour du catalogue de photographies d'identification des individus qui forment cette population. En 2014, la population d'épaulards résidents du nord était composée de 290 individus. Depuis 1974, la croissance de la population a suivi un taux annuel moyen de 2,2 %. La surveillance continue à partir de photographies d'identification est une activité de recherche essentielle à la stratégie de rétablissement de cette population menacée.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Killer whales off the west coast of Canada were among the first cetaceans found to be individually recognizable from photographs of natural markings (Bigg et al. 1976). The use of photo-identification to study killer whale populations in British Columbia began in 1973 and continues to the present (Ford 2011). Data collected using this method have been fundamental to the description of killer whale populations in the region and assessments of their abundance, life history traits and social organization (Bigg 1982; Bigg et al. 1990; Olesiuk et al. 1990, 2005; Ford and Ellis 1999; Ford et al. 1994, 2000, 2007, 2013, 2014; Williams and Lusseau 2006; Ellis et al. 2007, 2008, 2011; Foster et al. 2012; Towers et al. 2012a). The photo-identification technique has also facilitated a wide range of studies on the behaviour (e.g., Jacobsen 1986; Morton 1990; Baird and Dill 1995), acoustics (Ford and Fisher 1983; Ford 1991; Barrett-Lennard et al. 1996; Deecke et al. 2010), foraging ecology (Nichol and Shackleton 1996; Ford et al. 1998, 2005, 2010a,b; Ford and Ellis 2006) and genetics (Barrett-Lennard 2000) of killer whale populations in British Columbia.

Three separate ecotypes of killer whales have been found to share coastal waters off the west coast of Canada – residents, Bigg's (transients) and offshores. These ecotypes do not mix despite living in the same habitats, and as a result they are reproductively isolated and genetically distinct (Ford et al. 2000; Krahn et al. 2007a; Ford 2014). Each ecotype specializes on different prey resources. Resident killer whales feed on fish, with a strong preference for salmon, especially Chinook (Ford and Ellis 2006; Ford et al. 2010b). Bigg's killer whales prey on marine mammals (Ford et al. 1998) and offshore killer whales feed on sharks and other large fish species (Ford et al. 2011, 2014).

Resident killer whales in British Columbia are represented by two distinct populations, northern and southern, which have overlapping ranges but do not intermingle. The northern resident population, which is the subject of this report, ranges between southern Washington and southeastern Alaska (Dahlheim et al. 1997; Ford et al. 2000; Ellis et al. 2011). Within this overall range, the majority of encounters with northern resident killer whales have taken place in the coastal waters of British Columbia (Ford 2006; Ellis et al. 2011). The smaller southern resident killer whale population ranges from central California to southeastern Alaska (Ford 2012), but is found most frequently during summer and fall in the transboundary waters of the Salish Sea, between northern Washington and southern Vancouver Island (Ford et al. 1994).

Resident killer whales travel in family groups that remain cohesive over long periods of time (Bigg et al. 1987). These social groups, referred to as pods (Bigg et al. 1976), subpods (Bigg et al. 1987) or matrilines (Ford et al. 2000) are typically composed of one or more maternally-related reproductive females and their offspring. Maternally-related individuals that have descended from a common ancestor share a common

acoustic dialect and are thus referred to as belonging to the same clan (Ford 1991). Different clans have no calls in common and sound distinct. The northern resident population is composed of 3 clans – A, G and R. Southern resident killer whales all belong to J clan (Bigg et al. 1987).

Killer whales from both the northern and southern resident populations were exploited in British Columbia and Washington by a live-capture fishery that began in 1964 to supply demand for killer whales in aquariums. At least fifty individuals were removed from the northern and southern resident populations in the following decade (Bigg and Wolman, 1975; Bigg et al. 1976; Ford et al. 1994). Many other individuals were caught and released, sometimes on more than one occasion. Removals by this fishery and mortalities likely due to intentional shootings resulted in depleted resident killer whale populations by the early 1970s. Preliminary results of photo-identification studies by Bigg et al. (1976) showed that resident killer whale population sizes were too small to sustain this fishery. Combined with public opposition to the captures, this led to the end of the fishery in 1976 (Ford 2011).

Annual censuses of resident killer whales in both British Columbia and Washington have been undertaken each year since 1974, coordinated by researchers with the Pacific Biological Station, Nanaimo, BC (primarily northern residents) and the Center for Whale Research, Friday Harbor, WA (southern residents). Both resident populations showed a long-term positive growth trend between 1974 and the mid 1990s, increasing at average rates of 2.5 to 3% per annum (Bigg 1982; Olesiuk et al. 1990, 2005). Northern and southern resident populations both experienced sharp increases in mortality rates and a decline in abundance during the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s, which coincided with a coast-wide decline in availability of their primary prey, Chinook salmon (Ford et al. 2005, 2010a). In 2001, the conservation status of killer whales off the west coast was assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). The northern residents were designated as threatened and southern residents as endangered due to their small population sizes, low reproductive rate and the existence of a variety of anthropogenic threats (Ford 2006; COSEWIC 2008; Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2011). These populations were subsequently legally listed as such under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA), and the process of recovery strategy development and identification of critical habitat was initiated (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2011). Effort to annually census resident killer whales by photo-identification is recognized in the resident killer whale recovery strategy as an integral component of on-going population monitoring in Canada.

Results of the annual photo-identification censuses of resident killer whales have been presented in various scientific reports as well as catalogues intended for use by managers, field researchers, the whale-watch community and the interested public. Technical reports describing the population status and dynamics of resident killer whales include Bigg et al. (1976, 1990), Bigg (1982), Balcomb et al. (1980, 1982), Olesiuk et al. (1990, 2005), Ford et al. (2005, 2010b), and Ellis et al. (2011). Photo-

identification catalogues for northern and southern resident populations were provided in Bigg et al. (1987), and Ford et al. (1994, 2000). Updated catalogues of southern and northern residents have been periodically provided by the Center for Whale Research (whaleresearch.com) and the Cetacean Research Program at the Pacific Biological Station respectively (Ellis et al. 2007; 2011).

In this report, we present a summary of the current population status of the northern resident killer whale population through 2014, and an updated photo-identification catalogue of individuals. This catalogue includes demographic and genealogical data for all whales in the northern resident population. These data were gathered from annual photo-identification population censuses and associated long-term visual monitoring. This catalogue is intended to provide colleagues with a tool to facilitate their work. Furthermore, it is hoped that it will enrich observations of this population by marine wildlife viewers off the west coasts of Canada and the US.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Methods for the collection of identification photos of killer whales were first described in Bigg et al. (1976, 1986). Details outlining the use of updated field methods and equipment are described in Ellis et al. (2011). Photo-identification data analysis and management techniques are provided in Towers et al. (2012b).

2.2 DATA PRESENTATION

The appendix includes identification photographs of whales known or presumed to be alive at the end of the 2014 field season. In most cases, individuals laid out in clusters represent socially cohesive groups. However, some maternally-related individuals (primarily adult females with their own offspring, orphans and mature bulls without living mothers) may or may not exhibit social cohesion with others in their matriline (Ford and Ellis 2002; Ford 2006; DFO unpubl. data). Matrilines are typically named after the eldest living reproductive female within a group of maternally-related individuals, although if she has a surviving brother or uncle, the matriline is named after the deceased mother of the eldest male. Pod names are also provided and refer to the most distinctive whale documented in each social group when they were first identified in the early 1970s. Tabs are provided on the outside edge of each page to show the acoustic clan to which each group belongs (see introduction).

The appendix also includes schematic diagrams of the different northern resident killer whale lineages. The structure of each lineage is portrayed to represent matrilineal-based genealogical relationships that have been inferred from long-term observations of social organization (Bigg et al. 1987, 1990; Ford et al. 1994, 2000; Ford and Ellis 2002; Ellis et al. 2011). Diagrams include every individual documented over the course of the

study. Clear boxes represent individuals known or presumed to be alive in 2014 and shaded boxes represent deceased individuals (see key on page 15). Lines linking mothers and offspring are solid if the relationship is positive (i.e., known with certainty). This includes individuals that have been documented since birth. Relationships of whales born before the study began in the early 1970s are either probable, indicated by a dashed line, or possible, indicated by a dotted line.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Photo-identification censuses of the northern resident killer whale population have been conducted annually since 1974. The last population update and associated photo-identification catalogue was based on the 2010 field season and published in Ellis et al. (2011). During 2011–2014, we travelled up to 10,000 km per year in search of northern residents and averaged 58 encounters per year (range: 52-67) with this population. This is roughly consistent with the effort and number of encounters with northern residents during previous years (Bigg 1982; Ellis et al. 2011). Between 2011 and 2014 we analyzed a total of 28,012 identification images of whales in this population.

Although the majority of whales were photographed each year, it was not always possible to locate every animal during each field season. As a result, there was occasionally some uncertainty in the number of animals alive each year. For example, 33 individuals from the northern resident population could not be accounted for in 2014. The status of these individuals was confirmed when 28 of them were photo-identified in 2015 and five were not. Three other animals that disappeared from their matrilines part way through 2014 are included in the population count but identification images of them have been excluded from the appendix because they are now confirmed to be dead. In total, the northern resident killer whale population numbered 290 individuals in 2014.

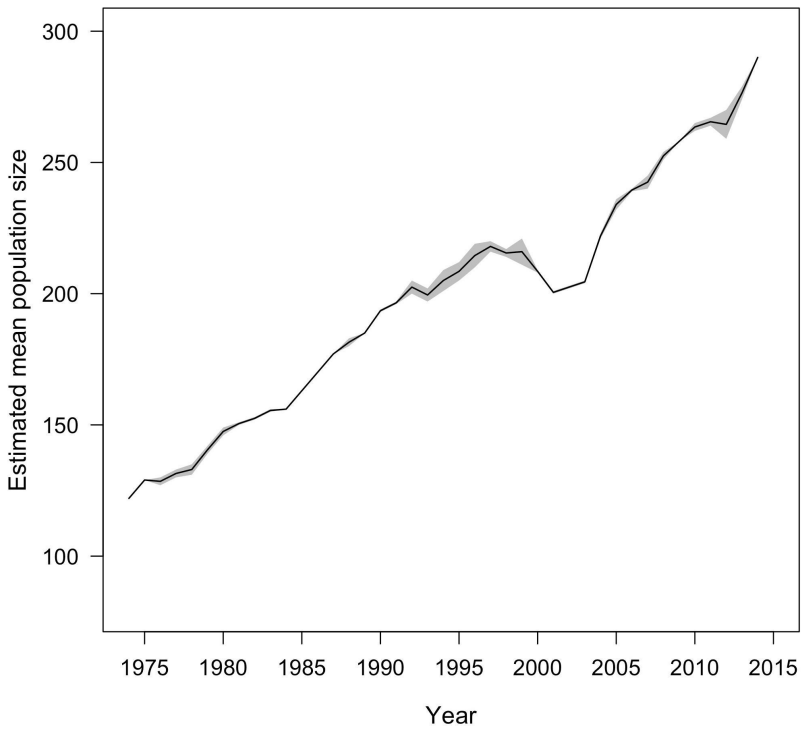

Figure 1. Abundance trend of the northern resident killer whale population, 1974–2014. In years with uncertainty, the minimum and maximum population sizes are represented with shading.

The abundance trend of the northern resident population during 1974–2014 is shown in Figure 1. From the mid 1970s to mid 1990s, the population grew steadily at an average mean annual rate of 2.6%, from approximately 122 individuals in 1974 to 218 in 1997. The population then declined by about 7% during 1998–2001, a period that coincided with a significant reduction in the availability of the whales' primary prey, Chinook salmon (Ford et al. 2010b). Starting in 2002, the growth trend became positive once again, with the population increasing at an average mean rate of 2.9% per year until 2014 (range = -0.4 – 8.6% per annum). This represents an average annual mean increase of 2.2% over the 40 year time series. All three northern resident clans experienced growth during 1974–2014, but at different rates (Figure 2). The G clan grew at the greatest average mean rate of 2.9% per annum followed by R clan at 2.1% per annum, and A clan at 1.9% per annum. By contrast, the southern resident population (J clan) has not maintained similar growth over the same time period (Bigg et al. 1976; Ellis et al. 2011; Cogan 2014).

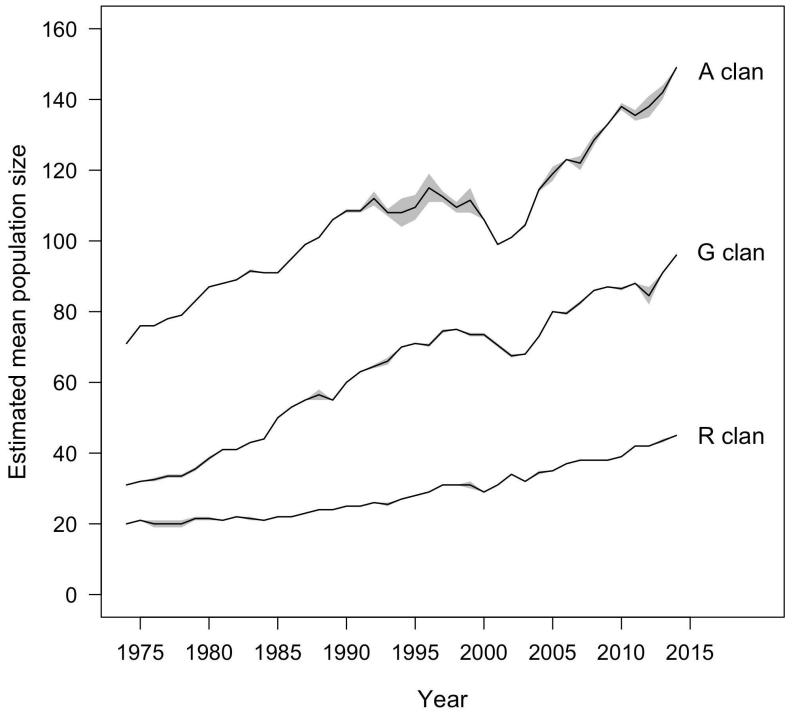

Figure 2. Abundance trends of A, G and R clans, 1974–2014. In years with uncertainty, the minimum and maximum population sizes are represented with shading.

Several factors may influence population trends for resident killer whales. Among these, prey availability (Ford et al. 2005, 2010a,b; Ayres et al. 2012), disturbance (Erbe 2002; Morton and Symonds 2002; Williams et al. 2002a,b; Williams and Ashe 2007; Lusseau et al. 2009) and pollution (Ross et al. 2000; Rayne et al. 2004; Ross 2006; Krahn et al. 2007b; 2009; Lachmuth et al. 2010, 2011; Williams et al. 2014) are of primary conservation concern (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2011). Several other threats such as vessel strikes (Williams and O'Hara 2009), entanglement (Bigg and Wolman 1975; Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2011) and intentional shootings also have the potential to directly affect mortality rates of the northern and southern resident killer whale populations.

With each year of field research, our understanding of the distribution, demographics, behaviour and population trends of northern resident killer whales improves, as does our ability to detect subtle changes in population parameters that may result from anthropogenic threats. On-going photo-identification monitoring will continue to be a key component of recovery efforts focused on the northern resident population and other communities of killer whales that live off the west coast of North America.

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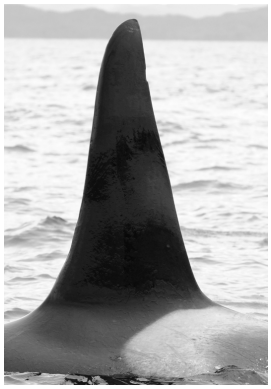
APPENDIX

PHOTO-IDENTIFICATION CATALOGUE OF NORTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALES

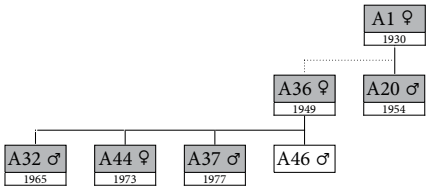
A1 Pod,
A36 Matriline

A46 ♂ 1982

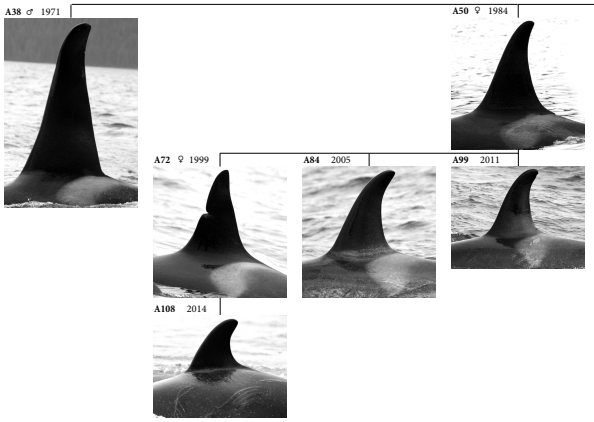


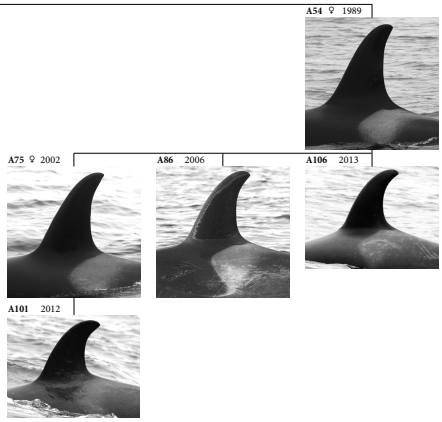
CATALOGUE KEY

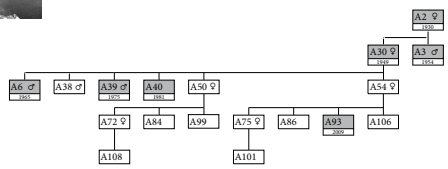
- A1 ♀ (1930) — Name, sex, and birth year of deceased whale
- A46 ♂ — Name and sex of live whale
- Positive Relationship
- Probable Relationship
- Possible Relationship



A1 Pod,
A30 Matriline

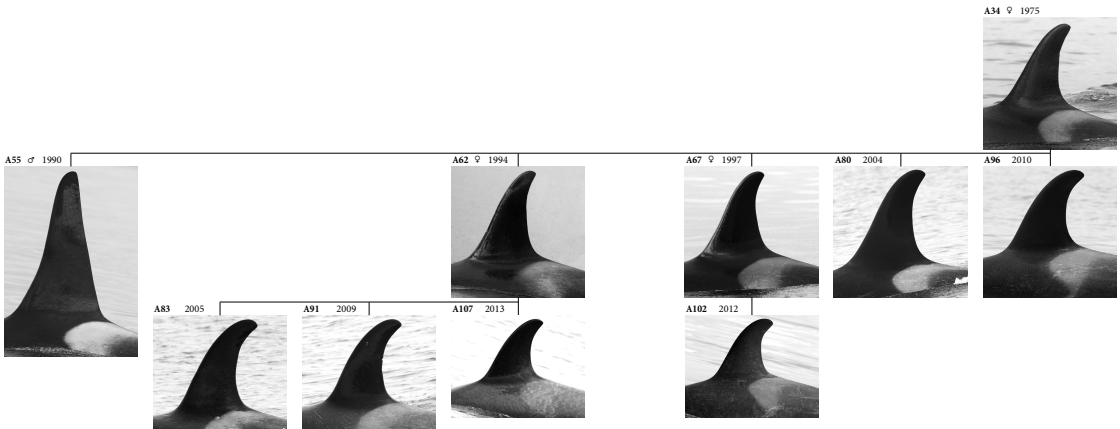


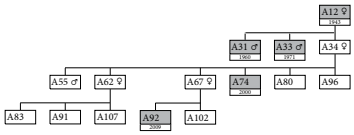




A-Clan

A1 Pod,
A34 Matriline





A-Clan

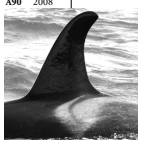
A4 Pod,
A35 Matriline

A35 ♀ 1974

A52 ♀ 1987

A70 ♀ 1999

A77 2003

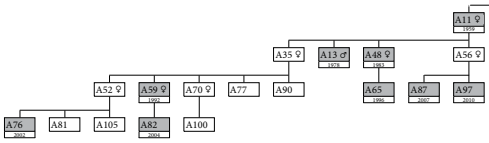


A90 2008

A81 2004

A105 2013

A100 2011



A4 Pod,
A56 Matriline

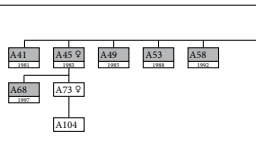
A56 ♀ 1990

A4 Pod,
A24 Matriline

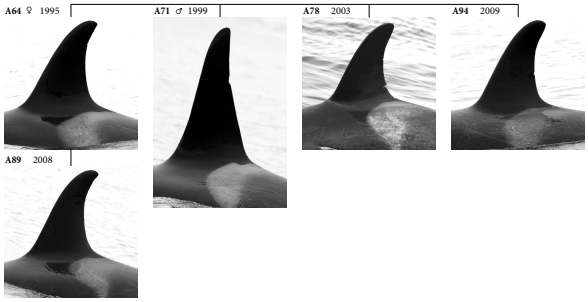
A73 and her offspring normally travel with the A35 and A56 matrilines.

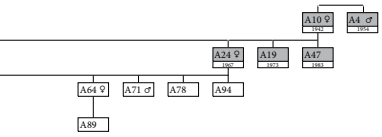
A73 ♀ 2000

A104 2013

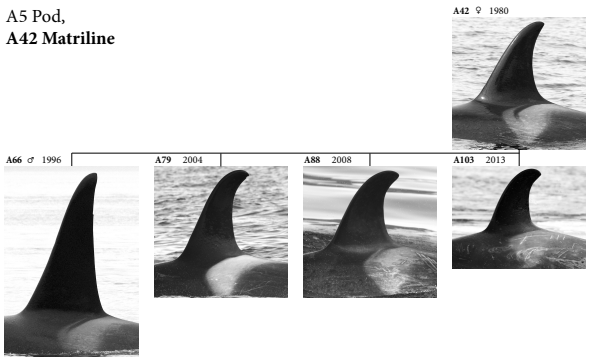


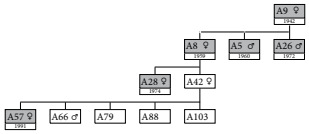
A4 Pod,
A24 Matriline
continued



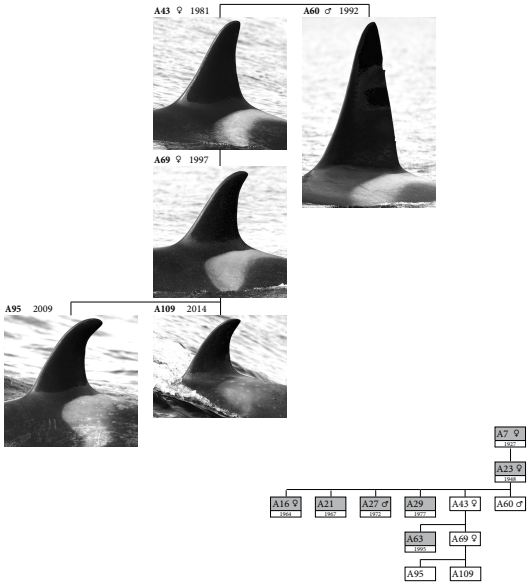


A5 Pod,
A42 Matriline

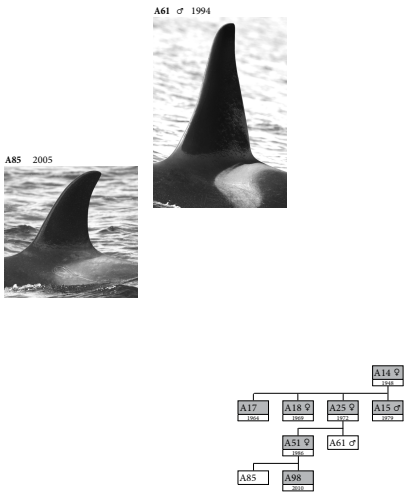




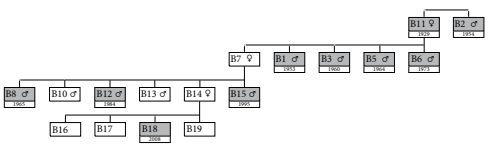
A5 Pod,
A23 Matriline



A5 Pod,
A25 Matriline



B1 Pod,
B7 Matriline

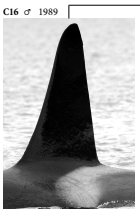


A-Clan

C1 Pod,
C6 Matriline

C8 ♀ 1975

C16 ♂ 1989



C22 ♂ 1997

C34 2013

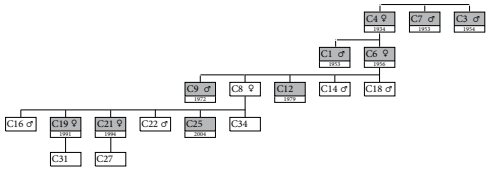
C31 2009

C27 2006

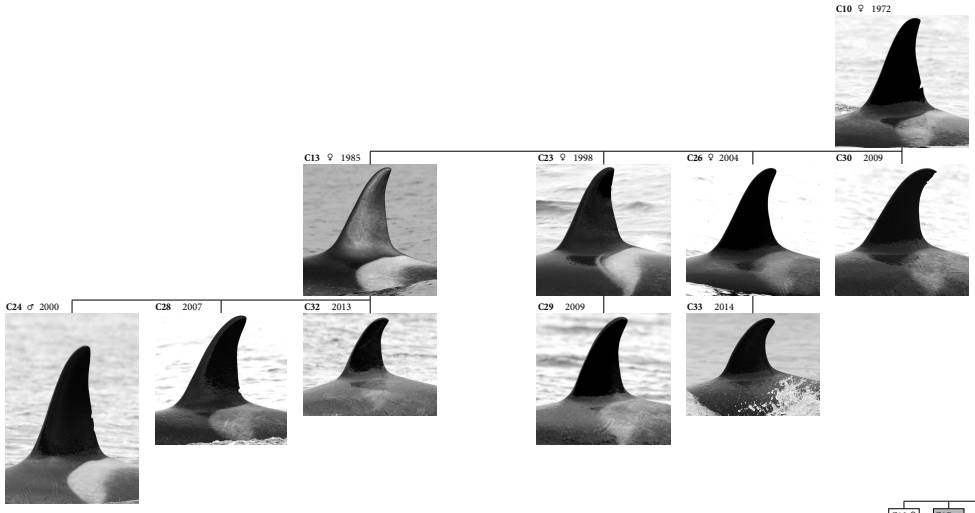
C8, her offspring, and C27 are not always documented with C14 and C18.

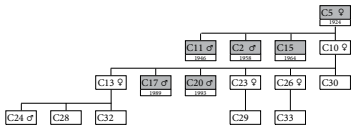
C14 ♂ 1985

C18 ♂ 1991



C1 Pod,
C10 Matriline

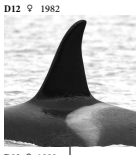




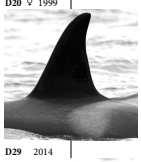
A-Clan

D1 Pod,
D12 Matriline

D12 ♀ 1982



D20 ♀ 1999



D29 2014

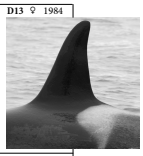
D1 Pod,
D9 Matriline

D9 ♀ 1972

Since the death of C19, C31 has been travelling with D9.

D1 Pod,
D13 Matriline

D13 ♀ 1984



D19 ♀ 1998

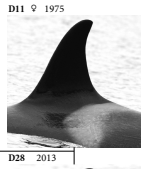
D23 2005

D27 2012

A-Clan

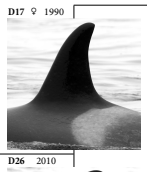
D1 Pod,
D11 Matriline

D11 ♀ 1975



The four matrilines in D pod are usually found together.

D17 ♀ 1990

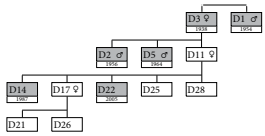


D25 2007

D28 2013

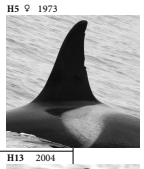
D21 2005

D26 2010

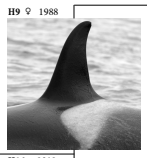


H1 Pod,
H5 Matriline

H5 ♀ 1973



H9 ♀ 1988



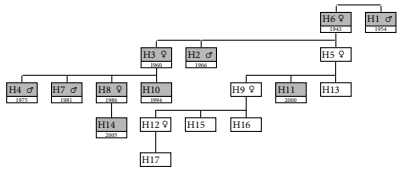
H13 2004

H12 ♀ 2002

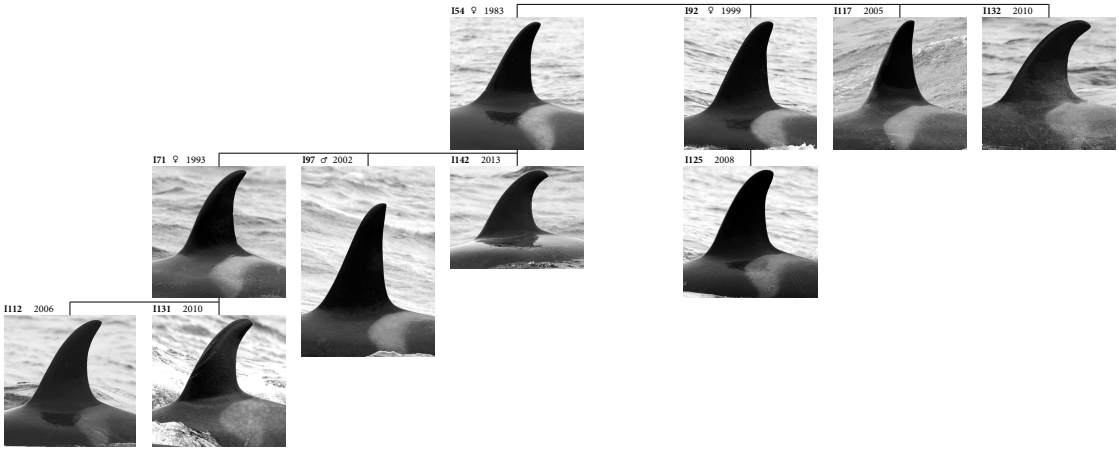
H15 2008

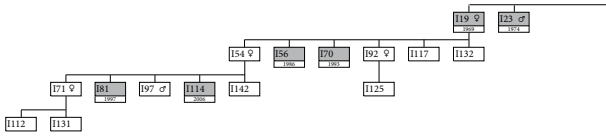
H16 2012

H17 2013



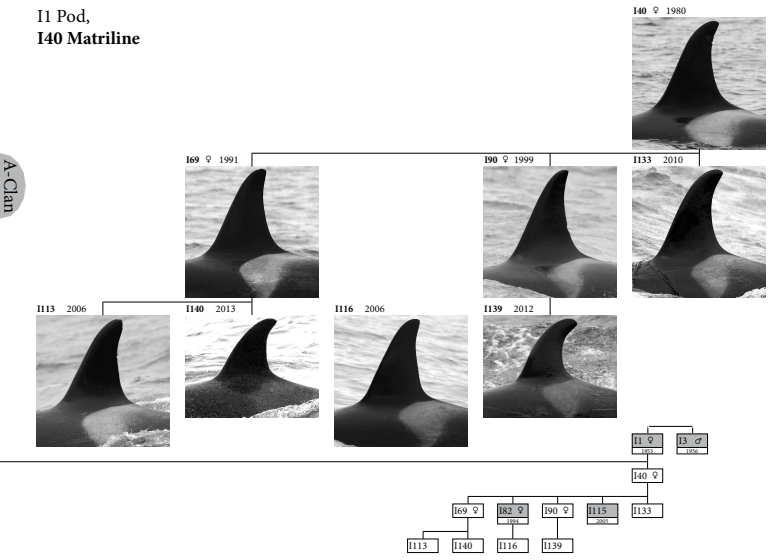
I1 Pod,
I19 Matriline





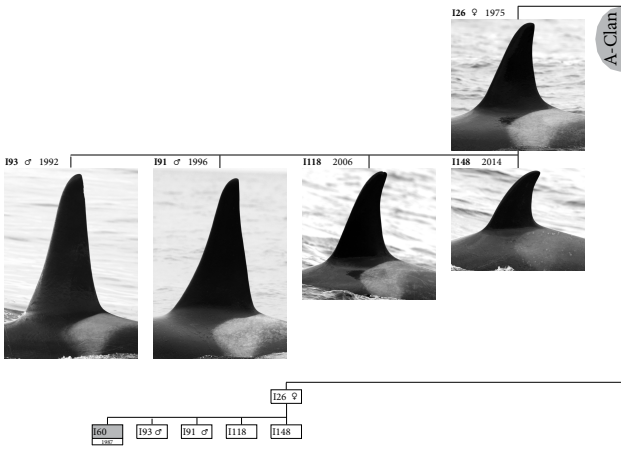
I1 Pod,
I40 Matriline

A-Clan



I18 Pod,
I17 Matriline

A-Clan



I18 Pod,
I17 Matriline
continued

I50 and her offspring are not always found with the rest of the I17 matriline.

I17 ♀ 1960

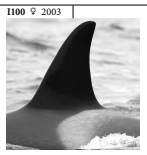
I50 ♀ 1983

I57 ♀ 1989

I99 ♀ 2003

I89 ♂ 1996

I100 ♀ 2003

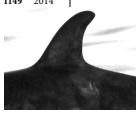


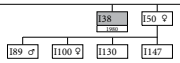
I130 2010

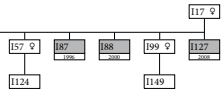
I147 2014

I124 2007

I149 2014



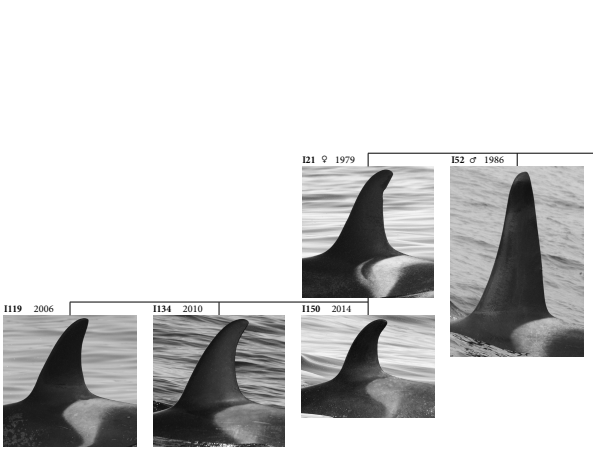


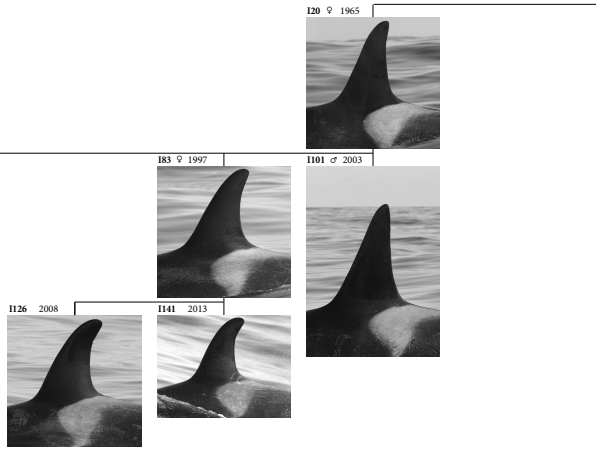


A-Clan

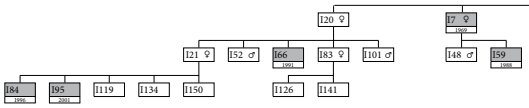
I18 Pod,
I18 Matriline

A-Clan

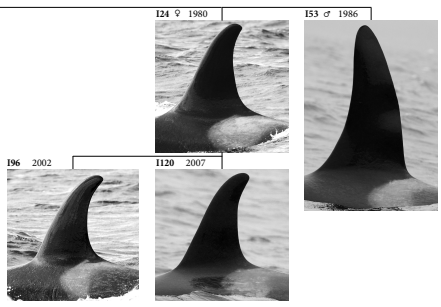




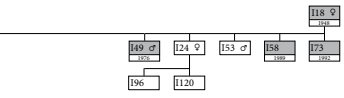
A-Clan



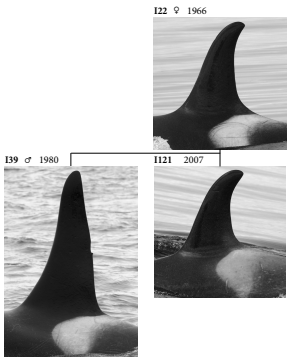
I18 Pod,
I18 Matriline
continued

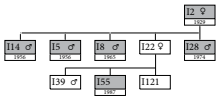


I24, her offspring, and I53 are not often found with others in the I18 matriline.

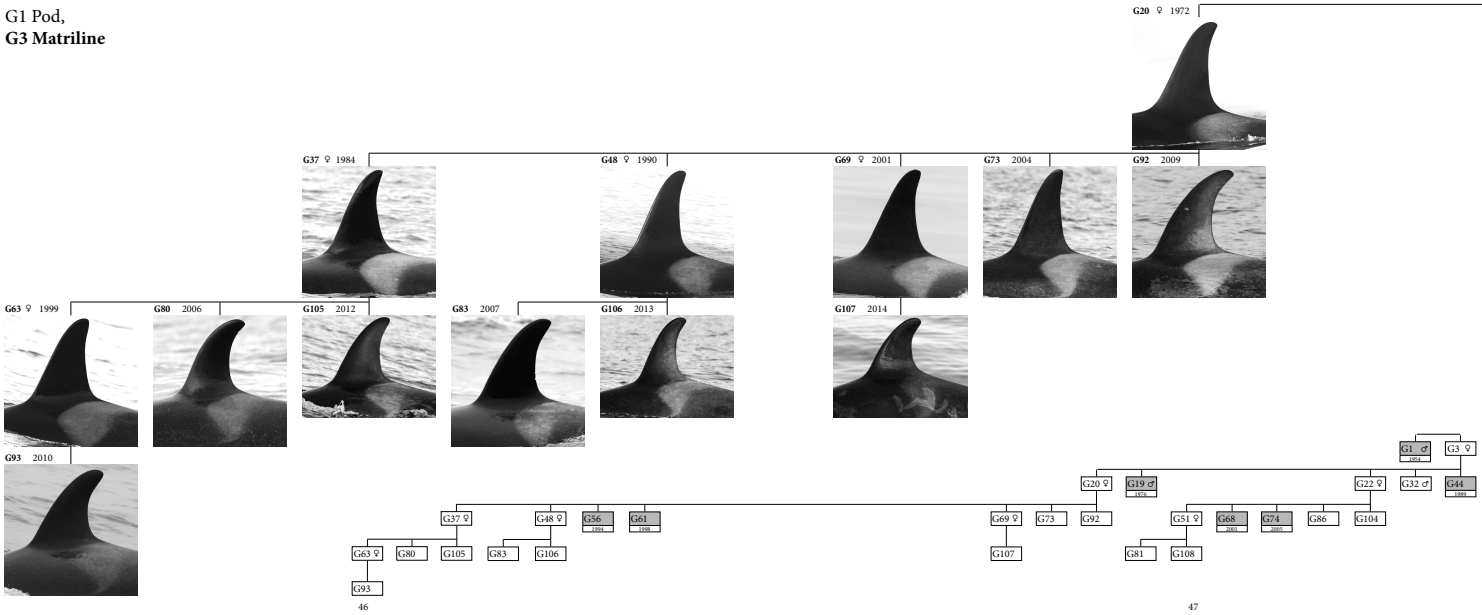


I2 Pod,
I22 Matriline



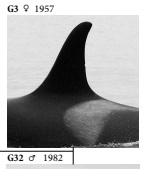


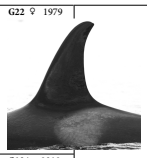
G1 Pod,
G3 Matriline



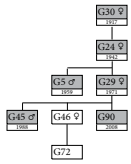
G-Clan

G1 Pod,
G3 Matriline
continued

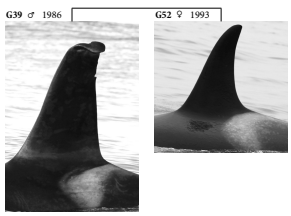




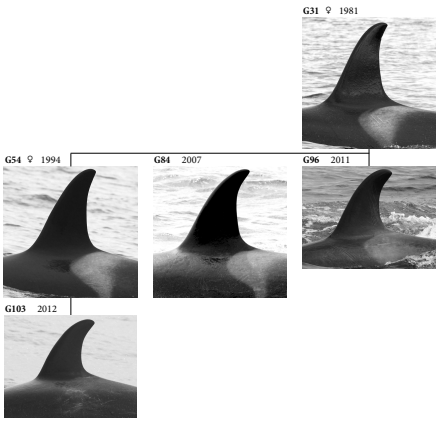
G1 Pod,
G46 Matriline



G1 Pod,
G16 Matriline

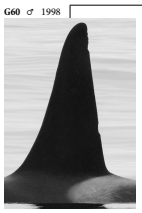


G1 Pod,
G31 Matriline



G1 Pod,
G17 Matriline

G60 ♂ 1998



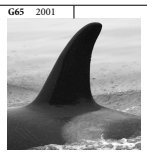
G78 2004

G65 and G38 are often found seperate from others in the G17 matriline. Similarly, G60 and G78 normally travel together independent of their other kin.

G50 ♀ 1991

G59 ♂ 1995

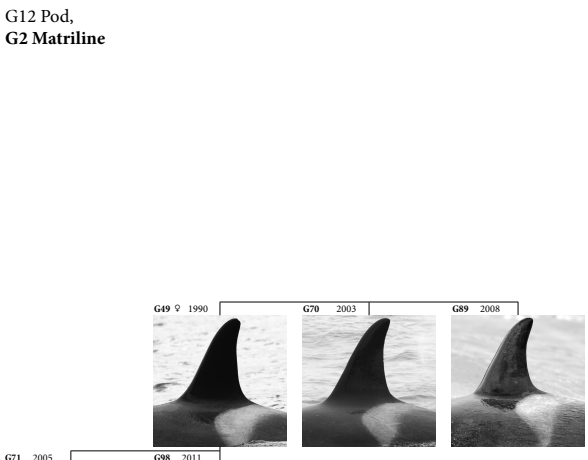
G65 2001

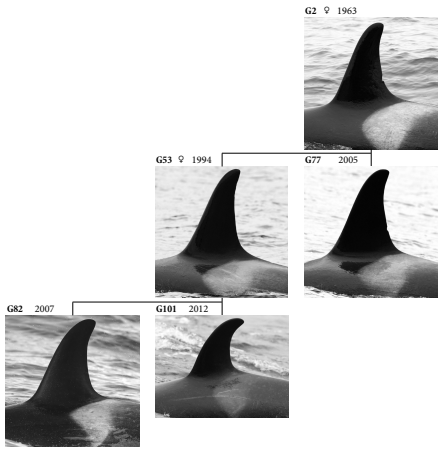


G79 2005

G38 ♂ 1986

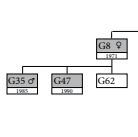
G12 Pod,
G2 Matriline



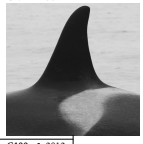


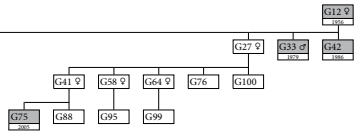
G-Clan

G12 Pod,
G8 Matriline

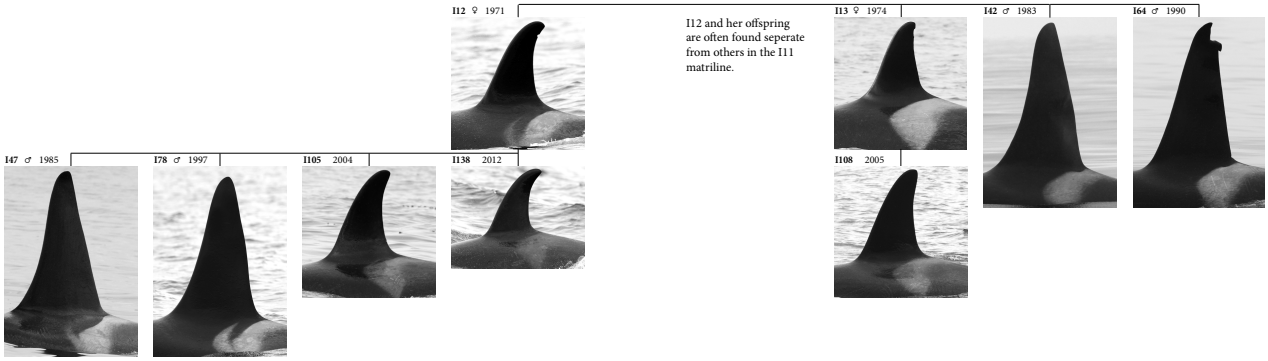


G12 Pod,
G27 Matriline



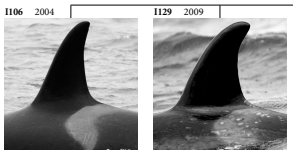


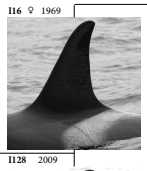
I11 Pod,
I11 Matriline

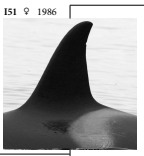


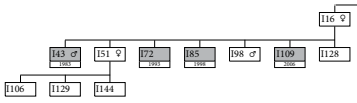
I12 and her offspring are often found seperate from others in the I11 matriline.

I11 Pod,
I16 Matriline





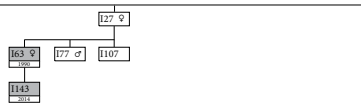




I16 ♀
I43 ♂ 1983
I51 ♀
I72 1993
I85 1998
I98 ♂
I109 2002
I128
I106
I129
I144

I11 Pod,
I27 Matriline

The four matrilines in the I15 lineage are usually found together.



I27 ♀
I63 ♀ 1990
I77 ♂
I107
I143 2014

I11 Pod,
I4 Matriline

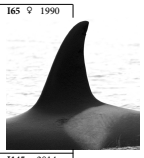
I4 ♀ 1980

I76 ♂ 1997

I102 2003

I11 Pod,
I65 Matriline

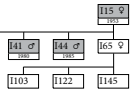
I65 ♀ 1990



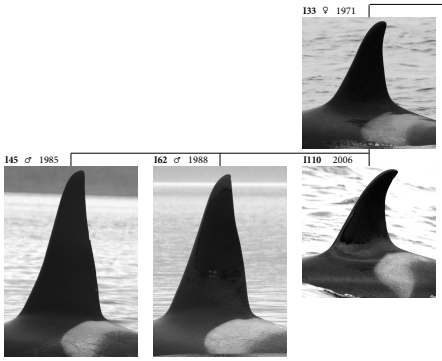
I103 2003

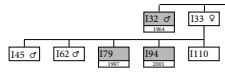
I122 2007

I145 2014

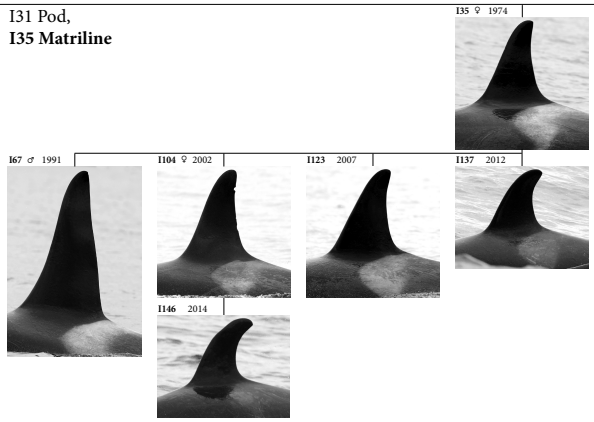


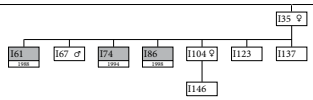
I31 Pod,
I33 Matriline





I31 Pod,
I35 Matriline





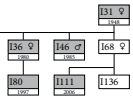
G-Clan

I31 Pod,
I68 Matriline

I68 ♀ 1991

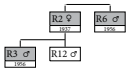
I136 2012

G-Clan



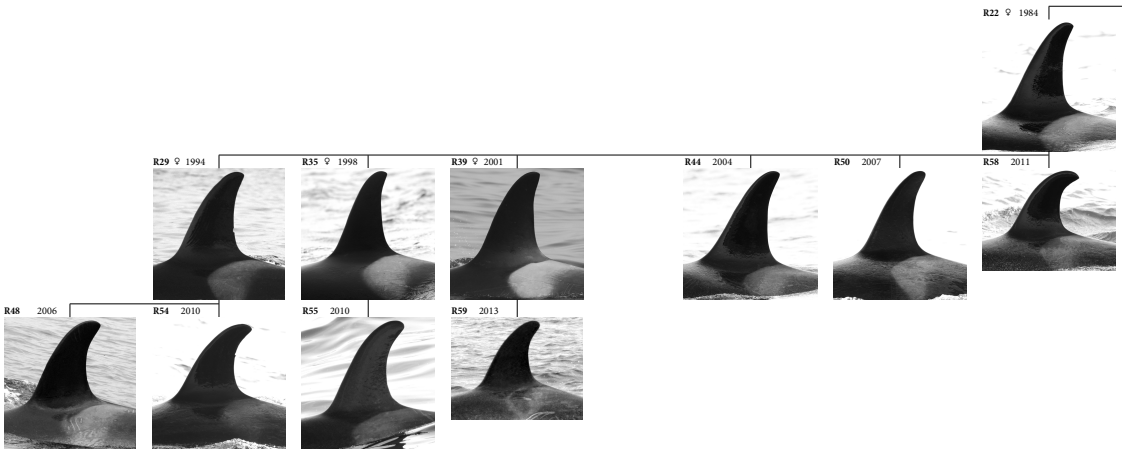
R1 Pod,
R2 Matriline

R12 ♂ 1967



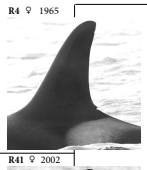
R-Clan

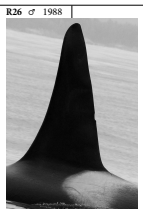
R1 Pod,
R5 Matriline

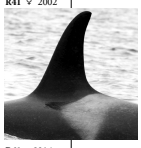


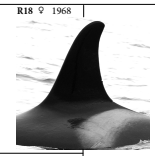
R22, her offspring, and their offspring are seldom observed in the presence of others in the R4 lineage.

R1 Pod,
R5 Matriline
continued

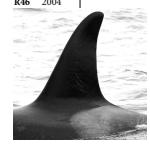


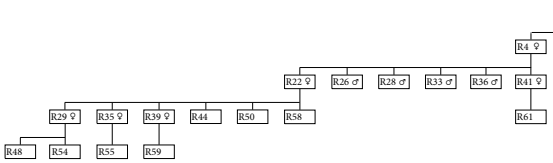


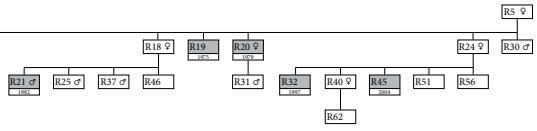




R18 and her offspring are often found travelling independent of others in the R5 matriline.

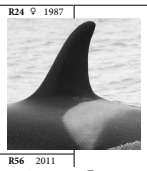






R1 Pod,
R5 Matriline
continued

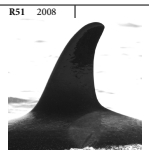

R5 ♀ 1949

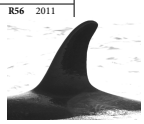

R24 ♀ 1987

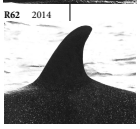

R30 ♂ 1994


R31 ♂ 1997


R40 ♀ 2001


R51 2008


R56 2011


R62 2014

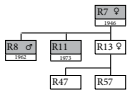
R1 Pod,
R13 Matriline


R13 ♀ 1979

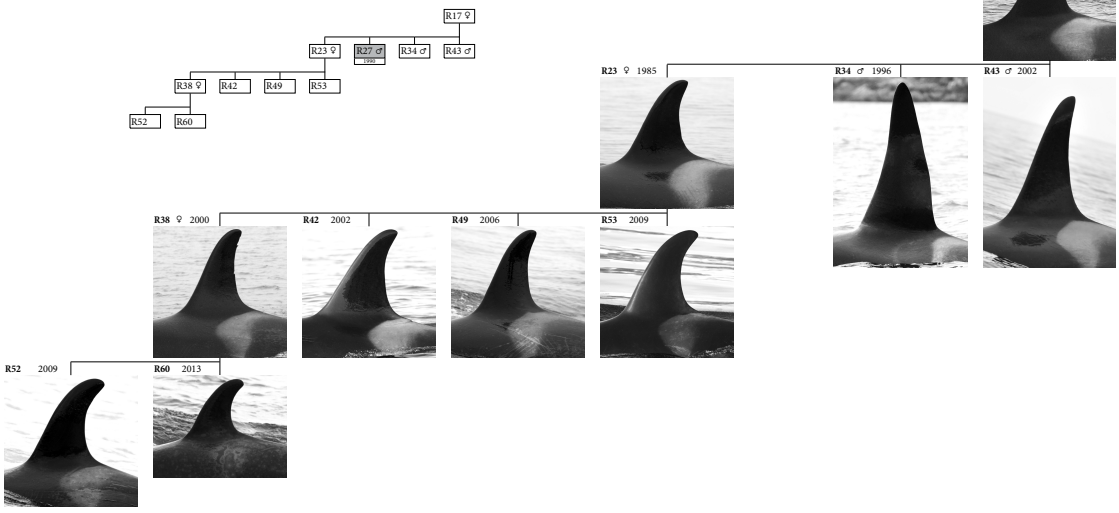
The R13 matriline is usually found travelling with W3 and R12.


R47 2005

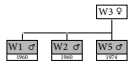

R57 2011



R1 Pod,
R17 Matriline



W1 Pod,
W3 Matriline



R-Clan