



Hosting on Whale Watching Boats

Being hosted on whale watching boats is a key part of the Citizen Science photo identification study of Blue Whales off Sri Lanka, which uses commercial whale watching trips for opportunistic data collection. Participants who can spend from 2 weeks to 3 months will be able to join the daily whale watching trips free of charge as part of the project.

The opportunity is primarily for resident Sri Lankans who are genuinely interested in cetacean conservation and research. But visitors on holiday can also participate. No specific experience is required, although you will need to have an interest in nature and own a digital SLR camera, ideally with a 300mm (or longer) lens. You also can gain and develop skills as a naturalist by engaging with the whale watching clients and interpreting the local marine wildlife. It helps to be a people-person with an out-going and confident personality. You will learn cetacean field identification, Photo ID and public-speaking.



Wild Blue Photo ID Project

During the months of November to April, large numbers of Blue Whales come to feed in the waters off Mirissa as part of their annual 'east-west' migration between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which takes them past southern Sri Lanka.

Wild Blue, the first Citizen Science study of Blue Whales in Sri Lanka, in association with Mirissa Water Sports, is continuing a long-term opportunistic photo identification study of this population.

The project aims to study and understand the migratory patterns of this species as well as investigate the dynamics of resident and migratory populations. By developing a public-access catalogue of individuals, we will be able to recognise whales when they return to these waters. In time, this method could provide us with information such as population estimates, sex ratios, calving seasons, movements and much more...all without disturbing the animals.



Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

Conservation status: Endangered (IUCN)

Maximum length: up to 100 ft/ 30.48 m

Habitat: Blue Whales are found worldwide mostly in cold and temperate waters, and prefer deeper ocean waters to coastal waters.

Distribution: World-wide, but we study the population in the Northern Indian Ocean.

Characteristics: Lightly mottled blue-grey, with light grey or yellow-white undersides. Its heart is the size of a Volkswagen Beetle.

Diet: Almost exclusively krill and sometimes copepods or crustaceans.

Threats: Collisions with ocean vessels; fishing gear; sound pollution caused by human activities; orca; global warming affecting ocean temperature, migratory routes and food supply.

Current records: over 80 individually identified blue whales in the catalogue.



Logistics Partner

Mirissa Water Sports (MWS) is a responsible whale watching company set up with funding from Building A Future Foundation in the wake of the tsunami. It partners with the project for volunteers to be aboard their commercial whale watching boats to collect data and to arrange accommodation and other logistics. With your help we aim to learn more about the largest animal to have lived on this planet. When the project expands, MWS will, where possible, arrange for volunteers to be hosted by other responsible boat operators as well.

Mirissa Water Sports support and promote responsible whale watching practices. They respect the animals and places in which they live, approach with care and limit the time spent near the animals.



The Wild Blue Project is dedicated to the study and conservation of the marine environment and Citizen Science cetacean research.

Ad hoc Blue Whale Images

We also welcome receiving ad hoc images of Blue Whales taken by anyone, resident or visitor, who has been whale watching in Sri Lanka.

For more information please contact

Georgina Gemmell

georgina.wildoceans@gmail.com



Wild Blue Photo ID

Photo Identification of Sri Lankan Blue Whales
Mirissa, Sri Lanka