

Meet the whales and their tails.....



“Saddle”: OM00-003: Saddle , a whale that originally had a distinctive saddle shaped light grey patch behind his dorsal fin, was first met by our research team in February 2000 when he was tangled in a fishing net in Duqm Bay. With support from the ROP and a helpful fisherman, who offered the use of his boat, the team was able to approach the whale and spend 3 hours cutting ropes, nets and anchors from the whale’s tail stock, pectoral fins and head. When he was finally free of the heavy fishing gear he swam out to sea and breached several times. The research team met him again just a few months later in October 2000 during one of the team’s earliest whale surveys in the north of the Gulf of Masirah. This time he was observed with a very distinctive individual whale named “Flatfin”. Saddle was observed again off Dhofar coast in February 2001, and yet again with Flatfin in the Hallaniyat Bay and off the central Dhofar coast in February 2002.

“Blacky” OM02-003: Named for his completely black tail flukes, Blacky was first observed in the Hallaniyat Bay area in February 2002 with Flatfin, and then later in the day with Saddle. During that field season, skin samples were collected from Blacky as well as other whales. Subsequent DNA analysis revealed that Blacky and his friends Saddle and Flatfin were all males. Blacky was observed again in March 2010 when the team conducted observations from a scenic cliff top on the coast of Dhofar, and yet again in both March and November 2011 in the same spot.



“Swoosh” OM02-021: This whale has a distinctive white swirl on the left side of his dorsal fin. Also proved to be a male through genetic analysis, Swoosh was first observed by the research team off of Likbe on November 12, 2002. He was hanging out with another male called “Floppy Fin” for the way in which his dorsal fin was bent over to one side. Both whales were incredibly relaxed and curious around the team’s 6m long Rigid Hulled Inflatable boat (RIB), approaching to within 1 m of the boat’s sides and hanging in the water for long periods right next to the boat.

“Scooby” OM10-001: was first observed from a cliff top in northern Dhofar in March 2010. He and Blacky were together at this time, engaged in a highly distinctive feeding behavior called “bubble netting”, during which whales circle around a school of fish under water releasing an intense stream of bubbles from the blow holes at the top of their heads. The circular curtain of bubbles form a net around the fish, trapping them in a tight school. The whales then take turns swimming up through the school of fish with gaping mouths. This type of feeding behavior is believed to be a learned behavior, passed on or taught by one individual to another. Scooby and Blacky were observed doing this again in the same place in March 2011, and were observed socializing together briefly near the favoured clifftop observation spot in November 2011. Scooby is named after the famous cartoon character ‘Scooby Doo’ who has a voracious appetite.

