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the eastern North Pacific in 1972

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ABSTRACT

Details are provided of 17 previously unreported catches of blue whales by the USSR in 1972. The catches were made between mid-July and mid-September in the eastern North Pacific at distances of from 96 to 626 nautical miles from the U.S. west coast. These previously unknown catches bring the total Soviet catch of North Pacific blue whales since 1948 to 1,638. They also highlight the inadequacy of the International Observer Scheme as implemented in 1972.

Ivashchenko *et al.* (2013) reported corrected catch totals for Soviet whaling operations (1948-79) in the North Pacific. These included 1,621 blue whales, *Balaenoptera musculus*, of which only 858 were officially reported to the IWC. Here, we report details of an additional 17 previously unrecorded catches of this species, taken by Soviet whaling fleets in the eastern North Pacific in 1972. Data on the catches were discovered in the joint scientific report for the *Vladivostok* and *Dal'ny Vostok* whaling fleets for the 1972 whaling season (Isakov *et al.* 1973).

The catches are listed in Table 1 below. Because the report gives joint figures for the *Vladivostok* and *Dal'ny Vostok*, it is not possible to determine whether the catches were made by one or both fleets; noon position data might clarify this, but these are known to be not entirely accurate for Soviet fleets (Ivashchenko, unpublished). The report gives the catch data in a table only, with no further discussion or information in the main text. To our knowledge, there were no other illegal catches made by either factory fleet in 1972.

These previously unknown catches bring the total Soviet catch of North Pacific blue whales since 1948 to 1,638; revised figures by year and whaling operation are given in Table 2. Catch locations are shown in Figure 1; these were at distances from the coasts of Washington and Oregon ranging from 96 to 626 nautical miles. For convenience and context, Figure 2 shows the locations of all Soviet blue whale catches ($n = 236$ animals) for which position data are available.

It is not clear how the Soviet fleet was able to kill blue whales (which were completely protected at this time), since 1972 saw the introduction of the IWC's International Observer Scheme (IOS), which required foreign observers to be placed aboard factory ships. During the 1972 IWC meeting, the IOS report (IWC/24/6) noted that appointments had been made by the Commission for the North Pacific observers and the exchange was between Japan and the USSR. Mr. S. Imazeki and Mr. M. Mizuno would go on two Soviet factory ships. The USSR provided IOS observers for all three of the Japanese factory ships that operated in the North Pacific in 1972. All of the IOS observers were paid by the government that nominated them.

At the 1973 IWC meeting, the IOS report (IWC/25/14) provided the details from the observers from the summer of 1972 in the North Pacific. Mr. S. Imazeki, a government supervisor on Japanese factory ships in the Antarctic, was

assigned to the Soviet factoryship *Dalnyi Vostok* and was aboard the vessel from June to September 1972. Mr M. Mizuno, an officer of a Japanese factory ship in the Antarctic, was assigned to the Soviet factory ship *Vladivostok* for the period June to September 1972. The details on how these observers arrived and departed the factory ships is not reported, but it is clear that both observers were aboard when the blue whale catches were made. All of the IOS observers were provide with copies of the Convention and Schedule and a memorandum outlining their duties. They were asked to report serious infraction immediately to the Commission, but “no serious infractions were reported”. However, Imazeki reported that six undersized whales were taken (five fin and one sei whale), and Mizuno reported that two undersized whales were landed (one fin and one sei whale). We consider the type of infractions reported by Imazeki and Mizuno to be minor compared to the catch of blue whales which had been protected in the North Pacific since the 1966 season.¹ Therefore, as has been noted by others (Mikhalev *et al.* 2009), it is clear from the blue whale takes reported here that illegal catches continued at some level despite implementation of the IOS.

Table 1
Soviet catches of blue whales in the eastern North Pacific, 1972. Stomach contents are presumed to be krill in all cases, but this is not specified in the source material.

	Month	Day	Sex	Length m	Long	Lat	Stomach contents
1	July	17	F	19.6	135 57' W	44 14'	Small qty krill
2	July	17	M	21.8	135 57' W	44 14'	full
3	July	18	M	20.1	133 53' W	42 44'	full
4	July	27	M	21.5	128 56' W	43 40'	full
5	July	27	M	22	128 56' W	43 40'	full
6	August	1	M	21.3	127 52' W	45 16'	full
7	August	3	F	23	126 26' W	44 02'	full
8	August	22	F	18.5	134 47' W	47 29'	Small qty krill
9	August	22	M	21.6	134 47' W	47 29'	full
10	August	22	F	24	134 47' W	47 29'	full
11	August	22	M	20	134 47' W	47 29'	full
12	August	22	F	20.3	134 47' W	47 29'	full
13	August	23	M	17.4	131 59' W	46 17'	Small qty krill
14	September	2	F	20.7	135 21' W	45 43'	full
15	September	2	M	20.5	135 21' W	45 43'	full
16	September	2	M	20	135 21' W	45 43'	full
17	September	13	F	20	138 46' W	44 42'	full

¹ At the 1965 Commission meeting, no objections were made by any of the Contracting Governments present, including the USSR, for the binding amendment proposed to paragraph 4(1) of the Schedule under which “it is forbidden to kill or to attempt to kill blue whales in the North Pacific Ocean and its dependent waters north of the Equator for five years beginning with the 1966 season”. In a statement by the USSR delegation at the Special Meeting of Commissioners from North Pacific Member Nations, which took place in Honolulu, Hawaii from 14 to 17 February 1966, they stated “it supports the resolution [*sic*] of the Commission forbidding the taking of blue whales in the North Pacific for five years from the 1966 season” (IWC 17:72).

At the 1970 meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee, it was recommended “that the present ban on killing blue and humpback whales be extended for at least three years beginning with the 1971 season” (IWC 23:30). The contracting governments at the 1970 Commission meeting agreed with the Scientific Committee and extended the existing North Pacific ban on killing blue whales.

Table 2

Soviet catches of blue whales in the North Pacific, 1948-78 (revised after Ivashchenko *et al.* 2013, Table 6). Numbers in parentheses are the officially reported catches. Another 29 blue whales were caught by the factory ship *Aleut* prior to 1948.

Year Station/FF	<i>Aleut</i>	<i>Kuril Islands</i>	<i>Sovetskaya Rossiya</i>	<i>Vladivostok</i>	<i>Dal'niy Vostok</i>	<i>Slava</i>	Total (reported)
1948	3						3 (3)
1949	3						3 (3)
1950	5	2					7 (7)
1951	7	9					16 (16)
1952	7	17					24 (24)
1953	11	10					21 (21)
1954	12	23					35 (35)
1955	4	27					31 (31)
1956	7	45					52 (52)
1957	9	44					53 (53)
1958		14					14 (14)
1959	22	19					41 (41)
1960		14					14 (14)
1961	2	15					17 (17)
1962	19	11	37				67 (30)
1963	14	1	108	299	88		510 (348)
1964	17		79	25	67		188 (77)
1965	10		43	163			216 (72)
1966				15	45		60 (0)
1967				51	43		94 (0)
1968				3	28	25	56 (0)
1969				2	15	33	73 (0)
1970				7	12		19 (0)
1971				4	3		7 (0)
1972					17		17 (0)
Total	152	251	267	592	301	58	1,638 (878)

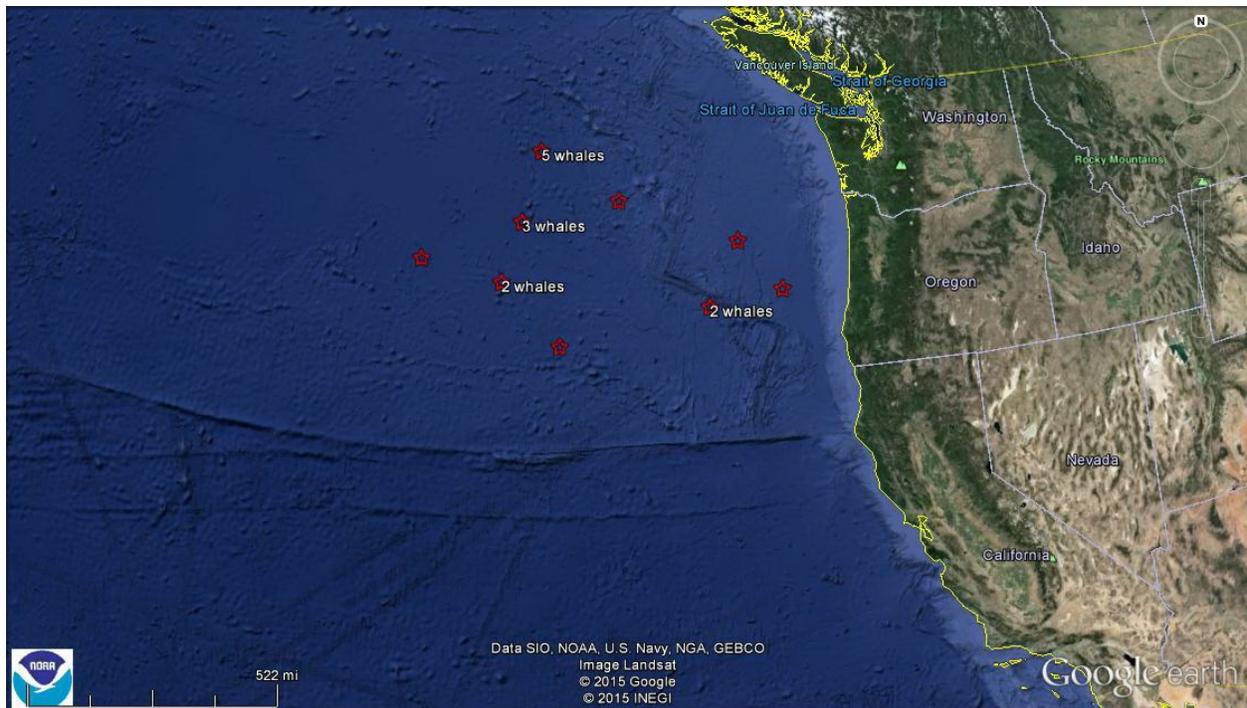


Fig. 1. Locations of previously unreported Soviet blue whale catches in 1972. Stars with no text represent single animals.

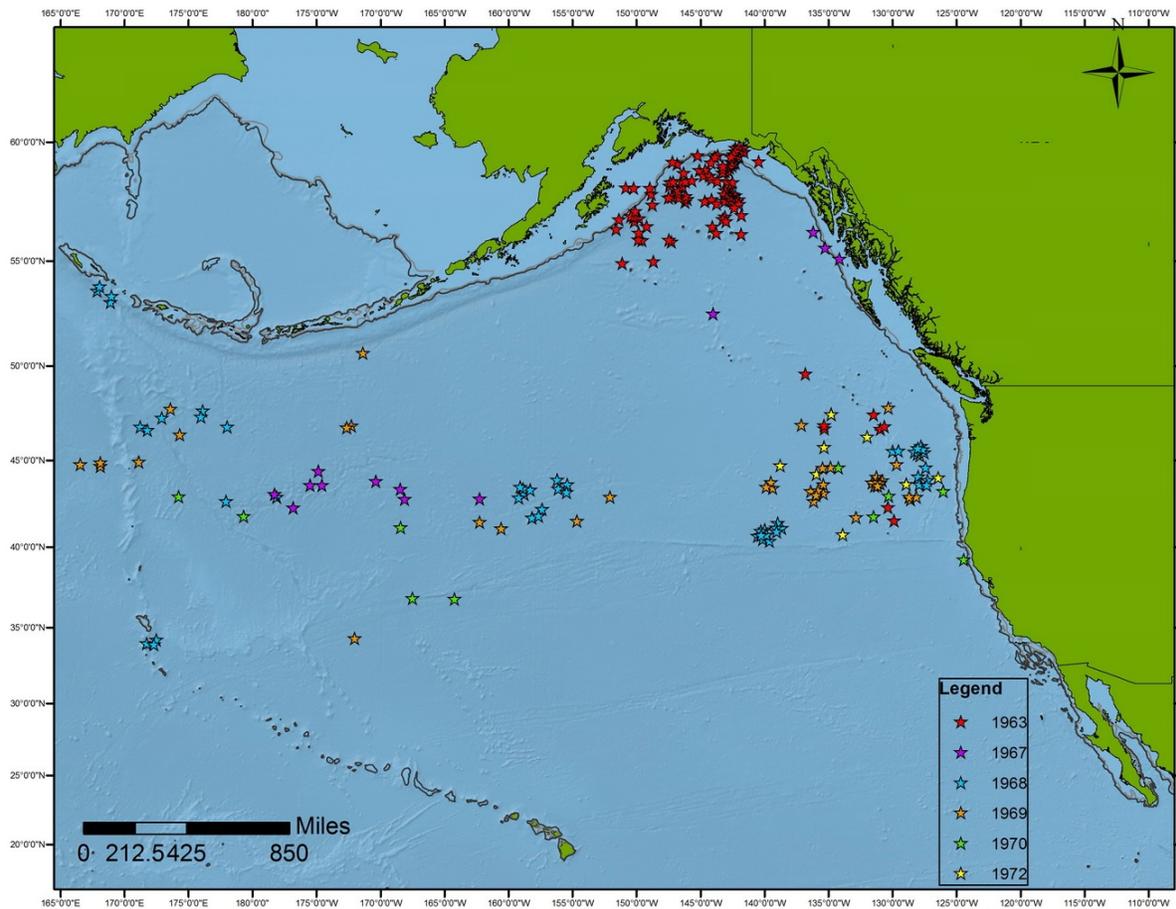


Fig 2. Locations of all Soviet blue whale catches ($n = 236$) for which position data exist.

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