



What did you do at the Lighthouse ?

I was an overseas PhD student at the Lighthouse between 2006-2012. I was based in the United States (Washington and California), but traveled to Scotland to spend a month each year at the Lighthouse Field Station. My PhD thesis focused on using individual-based data to make inference on three different populations: fish-eating “resident” killer whales in Alaska, endangered Southern Resident killer whales and bottlenose dolphins in the Bahamas. More specifically, I used photographs to estimate abundance and monitor population trends, describe social structure and estimate individual body lengths using aerial photographs. I worked with a number of groups during my thesis, including both government and non-government organizations based in the United States and the Bahamas.

What are you doing now ?

I am currently the Marine Mammal Research Director of SR3, SeaLife Response Rehabilitation and Research, a non-profit organization dedicated to the welfare of marine wildlife in the Pacific Northwest, USA. My husband, dog and I just relocated from Southern California to live off the grid on Stuart Island in the San Juan Islands, Washington. My colleagues and I pioneered the use of drones to study free-ranging cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and my primary study populations include killer whales in the Northeast Pacific (“Bigg’s” transient and endangered Southern Resident), humpback and gray whales in the North Pacific, bottlenose dolphins in Southern California and the Bahamas, and killer, humpback and minke whales in the Antarctic Peninsula. My research focuses on assessing the health and status of whale populations, as understanding their health is key to understanding the health of the ecosystem in which they occur. My greatest motivation is that my research efforts will continue informing conservation and management measures to help recover threatened populations and protect marine ecosystems around the world.

What advice would you give someone who wants to follow in your footsteps ?

Focus on doing what makes you happy and always keep pursuing your dreams!



Dr Holly Fearnbach

PhD • 2006 - 2012

