

## North Atlantic Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*) Identification and Occurrence along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula

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Killer whales in Iceland occur in coastal herring grounds in larger aggregations at certain times of the year, whereas they can be observed opportunistically in smaller groups travelling along the Icelandic shoreline year-round. An increase in killer whale sightings along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula since 2010 yielded unique opportunities for a detailed study of the population, conducted by Orca Guardians Iceland ([www.orcaguardians.org](http://www.orcaguardians.org)). Orca Guardians is an independent conservation nonprofit organization, dedicated to the protection of orcas in Icelandic waters and their habitat through non-invasive research and education.

Photo-identification, with the aid of whale watching vessels, is used to record as many individual killer whales as possible moving through the coastal waters of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, while extending field work over the longest achievable period.

Preliminary results, based on year-round systematically collected data from both land and sea since January 2014, provide first insights into migration patterns and social structure, on the basis of our photo-identification catalogue (published in April 2017). The catalogue features 322 North Atlantic killer whales identified in the waters of Breiðafjörður Bay. Our ongoing study will help identify possible critical habitat, through long-term monitoring of the population, and will thus provide crucial knowledge for conservation measures.