

Inviting Whales into the Conversation



Susan Parks
Assistant Professor, Department of Biology

CURRENT RESEARCH


Making sense of marine mammal communication for future preservation of endangered species

Oceanographic research is similar to space exploration, except that we know less about our oceans than we do about the moon! Despite our dependence upon the ocean for food and recreation, what lies below its turbulent surface is in many ways a mystery to science. Dr. Susan Parks, Assistant Professor of Biology at Syracuse University, studies marine mammal communication. Specifically, her research is focused on communication in large whales, and especially in humpback and right whales, on the east coast of the US. Drawn to marine mammal research because of the challenges in obtaining data in addition to the majesty of the creatures she studies, Dr. Parks helps to answer fundamental questions about the evolution of communication systems. Furthermore, her research is helping to address the degree to which human generated noise is affecting the animals below the ocean's surface.

Recent advancement in technology continues to open new horizons in Dr. Parks' research. Autonomous aerial and underwater vehicles are making it feasible to obtain high quality video images of marine mammals both from the air and underwater. This is rapidly increasing the quality of questions that can be answered within the field. In fact, her research has been highlighted for its innovation in breaking down the barriers of marine science by monitoring acoustics in addition to endangered species off the East Coast. Additionally, her leadership spans beyond the walls of her laboratory and field work as she is currently the Chair of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium, which helps study and conserve North Atlantic Right Whales. Furthermore, she is a member of a wide range of scientific societies from the Acoustical Society of America...

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AFFILIATION

 Syracuse University

EDUCATION

- Ph.D., Biological Oceanography, 2003, Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

AWARDS

- 2008 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE)
- 2007 Office of Naval Research Young Investigator Award (YIP)

RESEARCH AREAS

Environment, Ecology, Oceanic, Oceanic

FUNDING REQUEST

Your contributions will support the continued research of Dr. Susan Parks, of Syracuse University, as she answers fundamental questions about the communication systems of marine mammals. Donations will fund the necessary \$175K/year required for each field whale behavioral study. Additional funds will support personnel with \$50K/year required for each member of her team. The lives of our largest marine mammals are still in many ways a mystery; funding Dr. Parks will shed light on their behaviors and the consequences of human behavior on their wellbeing.