

# Killer whales might be in trouble

By The Seattle Times, adapted by Newsela staff

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A sheet of water cascades off the back of an Orca that surfaced in Haro Strait near a whale watching charter boat.

Scientists know a lot about killer whales. They know where the whales go in winter. They know that killer whales can tell one kind of salmon from another. They know what the whales do when they hear boat noises.

Still, scientists don't know why there aren't more whales.

Ten years ago, the U.S. government protected the killer whales in Puget Sound. Puget Sound is near the Pacific Ocean. The whales are also called orcas. They can't be hunted or caught. There should be more of them. Yet, the number of whales is shrinking.

Scientists are "trying to understand ... why the whales haven't increased more than they have," said Mike Ford. He is a whale expert with the government.

In one way, scientists already know. New discoveries show that orcas face many dangers.

## **Pollution Is Hurting Them**

In the early 1960s, there were 140 killer whales in Puget Sound. There may have been 200 or more 100 years ago. Then companies began catching orcas. They sold the whales to sea parks, like Sea World. By the early 1970s, there were 71 whales. Catching them became against the law. The number of whales quickly grew to 99.

As of last year, only 82 remain.

There are three main reasons for the lower number of whales. First, there isn't enough food to go around. Second, chemicals from pollution are building up in their bodies. And third, they are disturbed by noise from boats. The noise causes them to swim faster. They slap their tails more and hunt less. They use more energy just as they're getting less food.

New rules say ships have to stay 600 feet from whales. However, the ships don't always follow the rules, said Lynne Barre. She is another government whale expert.

## **Whales Keep Us Guessing**

There are many other whale mysteries. For some reason there aren't many young female whales.

If scientists could study dead orcas, they might understand more. But they rarely find dead orcas. Instead, when the orcas die, they just disappear. Scientists never learn why they died.

Scientists also don't understand much about whale behavior.

Sometimes, whales swim out toward the ocean. Then they stay there for two weeks. "Why?" asked Barre.

## Quiz

1. What efforts were made by the U.S. government to protect the killer whales?
  - (a) It found out where whales go during winters.
  - (b) It banned the hunting of whales.
  - (c) It is providing enough food for whales.
  - (d) It is studying the cause of whale deaths.
2. Which of the following is a mystery to scientists?
  - (a) The number of whales quickly grew to 99.
  - (b) The noise causes them to swim faster.
  - (c) They use more energy just as they're getting less food.
  - (d) Sometimes, whales swim out toward the ocean. Then they stay there for two weeks.
3. What BEST describes the overall structure of the text?
  - (a) chronological
  - (b) cause and effect
  - (c) problem and solution
  - (d) compare and contrast

4. Read the following two sentences from the article.

And third, they are disturbed by noise from boats.

The noise causes them to swim faster.

Which sentence below BEST describes the relationship between the two sentences?

- (a) The first sentence states a fact and the second one describes its effect.
- (b) The first sentence makes a point and the second one gives a reason for the same.
- (c) The first sentence sets the scene while the second sentence provides a fact.
- (d) The first sentence provides a fact and the second one includes details.

## Answer Key

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