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Whale hunt, Sea Shepherd saga and debate continue

9:53 AM, December 29, 2008



When a country (Japan) chooses to kill whales despite international opposition, and a controversial group ([Sea Shepherd Conservation Society](#)) decides to intervene, people from around the world take notice.

An item posted on Outposts last week generated 46 comments, mostly from people opposing Japan's annual slaughter performed under the guise of research, and many from people who either admire or despise Sea Shepherd's founder, Capt. Paul Watson, whose credibility has been questioned and whose methods of disrupting hunts can seem dangerous and foolhardy.

The latest report from Watson and his crew is that they've chased Japan's whaling fleet out of Australian waters and deeper into the Antarctic region, and have so far kept the whalers from enjoying an uninterrupted period to find and kill whales.

My take is simply that whales deserve a break, and it's refreshing to see there are groups trying to ensure they get one.

The international moratorium placed on whaling in 1986 (with a stupid loophole, allowing kills for research) was imposed to enable whales to rebound from what, for many species, was the brink of extinction.

Not every commenter opposed the hunts. One claimed Japan's killing of whales for meat (after scientific study, of course) was no different than us killing cows for hamburgers.

One major difference is that cows are dumb animals raised specifically for human consumption, while whales are wild creatures capable of communicating with song, and of great migrations to propagate.

Another difference is that whale meat, unlike beef, is not in demand. Japan is trying merely to maintain a long-standing whaling tradition. A [Greenpeace](#) spokesman emailed me a link to a [BBC story](#) published three years ago.



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It implied that Japan was literally trying to force whale meat on schoolchildren, frying it in breadcrumbs or mincing it into burgers. Essentially, Japan's younger residents do not like whale meat.



It was last popular after World War II, as a cheap source of protein. Beef and fresh fish, not whale meat, are preferred among most Japanese.

Understandably, Japan does not like being told what it can and cannot do. A fisheries official was quoted in the BBC story as stating, "Why do people in the West make such a big deal about our very limited hunting of whales? How would they feel if we told Americans they couldn't hunt deer, or if we told Australians to stop hunting kangaroos?"

I don't know about kangaroos, but deer hunting is a wildlife management tool designed to prevent herds from growing beyond their carrying capacities, whereupon they'd become susceptible to disease and population collapse. And deer hunting has not been condemned globally.

So while a nation clings to culture and tradition, Sea Shepherd maintains the fight as the lone group involved in direct confrontation, now that Greenpeace has decided against sending a boat to the region.

This much is clear: With no boats on site, there would be no disruption and more whales would die.

-- Pete Thomas

Photos: Image from Animal Planet's "Whale Wars" series profiling the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (top), and Sea Shepherd Capt. Paul Watson in a 1993 Los Angeles Times photo.

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More power to Sea Shepherd. I love the fact that they don't just protest about big, romantic issues like the whales. They are undertaking similar missions around the world to protect everything from seals to sharks to sea cucumbers.

People say who cares if X animal is wiped out, but I ask you, where do we get the majority of the ideas for our medicines and technology? In my opinion, every species on this planet is the equivalent of a biological scratch-off lottery ticket. The prizes in this lottery are cures for disease and unimaginable increases in technology of all types. For us to be willing to simply eat these potential lottery wins without even checking if there is a 'prize' inside is suicidally insane. What if something in the DNA of the American Passenger Pigeon, or any other species hunted to nothing, contained a cure for cancer? We will never know.

Posted by: Kirk | [December 29, 2008 at 11:34 AM](#)

Save the whales! Support the Sea Shepherd!

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Posted by: Jenna | December 29, 2008 at 11:55 AM

I think the Japanese have a huge ego problem here. They are acting up like spoilt children and seem to need to present themselves to the world as victims. Besides killing whales they also bash dolphins to death every year. I salute Sea Shepherd because, unlike others they don't just talk, they act!

Posted by: Mia | December 29, 2008 at 02:20 PM

Please stop printing that the Sea Shepherds are throwing just rotten butter on the Japanese whalers. Butyric Acid is extremely dangerous and you are contributing to teaching kids that can buy this stuff over the internet to think it is just a safe stink bomb they can throw on other kids or teachers as a harmless prank.

Only a 5% solution of Butyric Acid can blind a person for life. So what if Butyric Acid is found in trace amounts in rotten butter. Check the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) for phosphoric acid. Sounds like pretty dangerous stuff! And yet, it's a common ingredient in soft drinks. Check the MSDS for acetic acid... even more scary! Yet, in its diluted state, it's common vinegar. Sodium fluoride, that stuff you brush your teeth with, appears to be downright poison!

Butyric Acid Toxicology: Harmful if swallowed or inhaled. Corrosive, flammable and extremely unpleasant smell may cause nausea. Liquid will burn skin and eyes. Readily absorbed through the skin. Severe skin, eye and respiratory irritant. Eye irritant test on Butyric Acid on live rabbits in excess of a 5% solution of butyric acid caused severe injury in rabbits (graded 9/10; scored over 5 where 5 is severe injury).

Also, MSDS says that acute dermal toxicity (LD50) of butyric acid is 530mg/kg [rabbit], which roughly means you, can kill a rabbit that weigh 1kg by administering 0.53 g of the substance onto the skin. By simple calculation, it is roughly estimated that a human who weigh 70 kg can be killed by administering about 37 g of butyric acid onto the skin. It is obvious that the amount of butyric acid thrown onto the Japanese ship is enough to kill more than several people if someone was splashed with the stuff if the wind blew it in their face when the bottle broke.

MSDS says that butyric acid is readily absorbed through the skin and then degraded into other substances and that the biodegradation products are more toxic than butyric acid itself.

The high toxicity of butyric acid seems to be conferred by the toxicity of the biodegradation products rather than its acidity. For more proof on the dangers of Butyric Acid please use this link;

<http://www.intox.org/databank/documents/chemical/butyric/cie344.htm>

Posted by: Jason | December 29, 2008 at 05:17 PM

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Commentary and Editorial
Sunday, December 28, 2008
Cold Case in Cold Waters

Ice, Intrigue, Danger, Death, and Videotapes

Commentary by Captain Paul Watson

A sailor in the United States Navy in the Pacific during World War Two once described his war experience as long days of tedious boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. On board the Sea Shepherd ship Steve Irwin it's also long days of routine interspersed with moments of high excitement and anxiety.

The vastness of these waters is daunting. Chasing after the Japanese fleet involves days of running, trying to catch up to where our helicopter last spotted them. It involves dodging icebergs and more difficult and more dangerous, it involves navigating through unpredictable patches of floe ice. There are large chunks of ice bobbing at the surface called growlers that are difficult to see, especially in fog. These growlers are like mines and to strike one at the wrong angle at the wrong time going at a fast rate of speed could be disastrous. Already this year one of the tourists ships cruising in Antarctic waters was holed by a growler and the

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passengers had to be rescued.

And if the ship sinks, rescue is days away and even with full immersion suits, the frigid waters of this region would suck the life out of you like a dry sponge sucking up water.

This is a dangerous place. We have no illusions about that. When politicians like Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett make statements about how dangerous these waters are, he is implying that we should do nothing because of the possibility of disaster.

The difference between us and Mr. Garrett is that danger is just a word to him. It is an unknown reality that he rarely comes into contact with in Canberra. He wants us to save the whales without doing anything dangerous, without taking risks and without controversy.

Down here in these remote waters, we see things from a far different perspective. Danger, that is real danger, is all around us. We are well aware of the fragility of the hull of our ship relevant to the harsh hardness of ice and the savage ferocity of polar storms. We are also well aware of the fragility of our own bodies should we be forced to abandon ship into that frigid inky blackness from which survival rests on miracles alone.

We are also well aware that we deal with a ruthless and cruel enemy whose very reason for being here is to inflict agonizing suffering and to deliver cruel death to gentle, sensitive, intelligent and socially complex sentient beings. This is an enemy that retaliates with bullets and concussion grenades. An enemy that churns out a steady stream of rhetoric, condemning those who protect life as "terrorists" while defending their murderous activities under the guise of "research".

What Mr. Garrett does not understand nor appreciate is that there are some things worth taking risks for, some things worth risking all for, and even dying for.

I believe that upholding international conservation law protecting endangered species is worth putting my ship, my crew and myself into harm's way. We are not down here fighting for oil wells or real estate, for religion or for money. We are down here defending the future heritage of humanity from the forces of greed and corruption.

Try as they might to dress us in the cloak of villains and criminals, the world is not fooled. They see dedicated men and women from a dozen nations, volunteering to risk the elements, to risk all to protect and save the lives of whales. To place oneself in harm's way to protect another is the definition of heroism and to do so for another species is to add selflessness to that virtue and the men and women who serve on this ship under my command are all here for one very common reason and that is compassion. They are all true heroes.

Our opposition on the other hand is down here because they are paid to be here. They are hired mercenary thugs who travel here with one purpose and that is to deliver a cruel death to some one thousand defenceless whales each year.

They cry foul when we throw stinking rotten butter onto their decks and accuse us of terrorism for blocking their ships yet they spill thousands of steaming gallons of the hottest blood on earth into the cold dark waters of the Southern Ocean.

In five years of confrontations we have never injured a single whaler in these waters and in over three decades of campaigns around the world we have never caused a single injury to a single person we have opposed. We are so dedicated to non-violence that not one animal has suffered or died to feed the Sea Shepherd crew on the Steve Irwin.

Yet in the bizarre world of public relations where black can be marketed as white for the right price, the propaganda spin literally makes the public dizzy with confusion. Our rotten butter bombs become "acid" giving the impression that we are throwing sulphuric acid into the face of the whalers. The reality of course is that many of the things we eat are technically acid and butter is butyric acid as orange juice is citric acid. What is lost in the "acid throwing" spin is the fact that beer is more acidic than rotten butter.

Our attacks on the whalers employ foul smelling, slippery substances that are all non-toxic, non-allergic, organic and biodegradable.

The other charge the whalers are constantly making is that Sea Shepherd crew are criminals. This is the most absurd charge of all. What we have is a whaling fleet targeting endangered whales in an established international whale sanctuary in violation of a global moratorium on commercial whaling and in contempt of an Australian Federal Court ruling specifically prohibiting whaling in Australian territorial waters.

They are in violation of the regulations of the International Whaling Commission, (IWC) the Antarctic Treaty, and the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). And they are in violation of Australian law for violating a court order.

They have not been able to cite one law that Sea Shepherd has violated other than their continued rhetorical allegations that we are criminals. If in fact we have committed a criminal act then the logical question is; why have we not been charged with a crime during the five years we have been opposing their illegal activities?

The reason the whalers have not been charged is simply because they have the money and the power to circumvent the law and to bully other countries into not opposing them.

So for eight years and five campaigns Sea Shepherd has disrupted illegal Japanese whaling activities in the Southern Ocean and during that entire time we have not caused a single injury nor have we been charged with a crime.

The facts speak for themselves and our record is undeniable.

In response to my being shot last year, the Japanese deny that there were any shots fired despite the fact that it was reported by Reuters that Japan had informed Australia that shots were fired. They accused me of fabricating the shooting and they accused Animal Planet of scripting it.

If it was fabricated then it was a feat of magic worthy of David Copperfield because the bullet hole in my suit was not there and then it was. I never left the bridge and was interviewed just prior to the shooting with my badge, my vest, my mustang suit and sweater intact. And then without ever going off camera, a bullet is removed from my Kevlar vest and the doctor examines my chest to witness the bruising. We have no such gun onboard the ship as Australian Customs is well aware. And the problem was that there was no law enforcement agency, in Australia or otherwise willing to do a forensic examination of the bullet, badge and vest. Such an examination would have helped to clear up the mystery but science was rejected in favour of political posturing and unsubstantiated allegations.

To underscore the refusal by the authorities to properly investigate the shooting, I jokingly presented the bullet and the badge to William Peterson who plays a forensics investigator on CSI. He said it looked like a bullet to him and the imprint of the badge was clearly visible in the lead of the bullet. Of course William Peterson is not a real forensics detective but it was the best we could get and what I mean by this is that if the Japanese or anyone else has reason to deny the shooting then they should examine the evidence instead of offering their politically biased opinions.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is down in the Southern Ocean because governments refuse to uphold the international conservation regulations that they are signatory to. We act as citizens when our governments fail to uphold their responsibilities.

Over two decades of diplomacy to end illegal Japanese whaling has failed. Diplomacy is a tool that the Japanese government uses to buy time while they kill whales. They have not conceded an inch, they have not lowered their quotas by a single whale and they continue to spit in the face of citizens around the world who want to see the whales protected, especially in an internationally established whale sanctuary.

What is it about the word sanctuary that governments do not understand? You don't kill whales in a whale sanctuary. You don't kill whales to sell their meat when there is an international moratorium on commercial whaling. And you don't debase science by prostituting the name for profits.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is fighting this battle on many fronts, in the field at sea, in the forum of public opinion and if need be, in the courts.

Although we deploy stink bombs to disrupt the whalers, our primary weapon is in fact the most powerful weapon on the planet - the camera.

Instead of cannons, we go to sea with cameras and whereas a frigate of the 18th Century would have had 64 mounted cannons, we have some 64 cameras capturing every movement and every action from different angles using different lenses and capturing sound.

I have been fighting this war to save the whales since 1974. For thirty-five years I have been taking ships to sea to disrupt whaling activities. I've taken on whalers in the North Pacific, the Southern Oceans, in the Bering Sea, the North Sea, the North Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. I've rammed whalers, sunk whalers, boarded whalers, harassed and pursued whalers for three and a half decades and my greatest pleasure in life is depriving whalers of their profits and knowing that whales are swimming free in the ocean that would otherwise be dead without our intervention.

In all that time, I have never been convicted of a felony nor have I been sued and the reason for this is that despite the propaganda of the public relations firms representing the whaling industries - we have been dealing with criminals, and the law for the most part has been on our side and when it isn't we are most careful to walk in the shadow of the law to achieve justice.

In the whale wars, the good guys wear black and fly the skull and crossbones and the reason why we do is because of a lesson learned from history.

It was not the British government or the British Navy that ended piracy in the Caribbean. There were too many British merchants dependent upon the illicit profits of piracy and a great deal of bribery and corruption swaying the politicians and the military of the day. Not much different than today really. Piracy in the Caribbean was ended by Captain Henry Morgan - a pirate.

In the whale wars, Sea Shepherd crew are passionate pirates of compassion in pursuit of greedy pirates of ecological destruction doing what governments have not got the political, economic or moral will to do - upholding the law.

Posted by: starburd | [December 29, 2008 at 07:53 PM](#)

Violence begets violence mate. It will be a shame to see that crew sleepin with the fishes when they ram the wrong boat and sink themselves.

Why is it that those who pretend to love peace often are the most angry, bitter and violent people?

Posted by: Ryan | [December 30, 2008 at 02:09 AM](#)

Good article, it's good to see a journalist take a stand and formulate an opinion, and not just regurgitate stale information. The fact that the Japanese, like your article states, liken whale

hunting to Deer Hunting or Kangaroo hunting, just proves thier ignorance, and un-willingness to look at the facts. I mean really, how can you liken one to the other....I don't even need to elaborate, it's that absurd of a comment.

I am not a racist, but the more and more I try to educate myself about our environment and the animals we should be here to protect, not destroy, I find myself hating these Asian Countries! They need to wake up out of the dark ages, and shed some of these "cultures" they always point to in defense. Is it culture that drives the Chinese and Japanese to continue to fuel the illegal game market, for ivory, tiger bones, and monkey heads, just to be crushed up into some form of medicinal viagra, or is it because Asian male's are just self conscious about thier little we's?! Is it culture that drives the Japanese to continue to hunt whales, or is it an insatiable ego of doing whatever ever they want, and not having to comply to the wishes of anyone else?! Is it Japanese culture that is leading to the catastraphic collapse of tuna stock's, or is it pure greed and ignorance that drives Japanese Business men to fuel this market and drive up prices at every port around the world?! Is it Chinese culture to de-fin living sharks, chuck them back in the ocean to die a slow painful death, and decimate populations WORLD WIDE, not just in your oceans, or is it yet another example of pure ignorance?! Fuel a market that kills 100 million sharks a year, just so you can have some fancy soup at a wedding or business meeting! Point being, this is not CULTURE, this is plain ignorance, and even more a lack of respect to not only one's self but more importantly the rest of the world. You don't own the world's oceans, jungles, forests, etc. Yet these "Large Asian" countries are leading the world in destruction of these wonderful gifts from nature and doing it with a smile and smug smerk on thier face. Wake up you NIT WITS!

Posted by: Brendan Maas | [December 30, 2008 at 06:56 AM](#)

Dear Whale lovers, you can make a big difference today,

I wanted to let you know that the first round of voting for the "Ideas for Change in America" competition will end this Wednesday, December 31 at midnight Pacific Time.

Please vote! We only have a matter of hours now to save our whales! This is the address, please copy, paste and vote!

http://www.change.org/ideas/view/whale_wars_needs_immediate_us_naval_support_2

The top three ideas in each category will make it to the final round.

Thank you very much,

Peter Boyd

For more info:

www.myspace.com/waterhammocks.com

<http://seashepherds.ning.com/>

Posted by: Peter Boyd | [December 30, 2008 at 07:21 AM](#)

I am not a fan of the killing of whales. But what this Sea Shepherd guy is doing is breaking the law. He is nothing but an eco-terrorist.

Posted by: Tornadoes28 | [December 30, 2008 at 03:23 PM](#)

Paul Watson an "eco-terrorist"?? Oh, come ON! Just think about what the word means -- effectively, one who terrorizes the environment.

If we have to use a label, it's one that best fits the Japanese whaling fleet.

To me and many others, Watson and the Sea Shepherds are protectors of the environment -- eco-WARRIORS, in fact.

Next, exactly what laws are they breaking? It's the whalers who are breaking international conservation regulations.

Next, you'd have to be a cold-hearted human being who wasn't "angry" about whales being harpooned and electrocuted to death, and for no damn good reason other than ego and pride. Culture? Garbage. Research it.

And finally, the Sea Shepherds are not "violent". How do you commit violence against inanimate objects such as ship decks? 30 years of direct action and not a single person has been killed from or on their campaigns.

Look, it's as simple as this -- without life in the oceans, we all perish. The oceans are on the verge of collapse (again, research it!) and the Sea Shepherd is part of humanity's last stand against its own greed and insanity.

As I said, they are warriors.

Posted by: Susan | [December 30, 2008 at 04:30 PM](#)

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