

Seattle-based Non-profit is Setting Sail to Find the Rarest Whale in the World

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Japanese scroll image of a North Pacific right whale. Anonymous.

Image from New Bedford Whaling Museum, Kendall Collection, 2001.100.4463

A local crew of sailors and marine scientists are leaving on an expedition this week to look for the rarest whale in the world, the North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*).

The expedition will be led by Kevin Campion, founder of marine education nonprofit Deep Green Wilderness. Campion and a crew of four set sail out of Dutch Harbor on Aug. 14, en route to the Bering Sea to continue their search for the rare whale.

Commercial whaling in the 19th century nearly obliterated the right whale population, and scientists now say there are just 30 North Pacific right whales (NPRW) left in the East Pacific. (Note from NBWM: the overall population of NPRWs is estimated to be in the low 100s) They're known for spending summers feeding in remote parts of the Bering Sea.

Campion and the crew — Shawneece Schneider, Elizabeth Robinson, Connor Gallagher, Lindsay Walker, and Sooty the dog — will depart on the S/V Muktuk out of Dutch Harbor. They'll travel for two days to the NOAA-moored research buoy "Peggy" in the middle of the right whale's critical habitat, and spend several days looking for the whales and listening for their characteristic "gunshot" calls.

Marine mammal scientist Jessica Crance says the best estimate puts the total population at only 30 individual North Pacific Right Whales, and within that, it's roughly a 2-to-1 male ratio. Joe Gaydos, science director of SeaDoc Society, says the search for the whale couldn't come at a better time.

"Saying that Deep Green Wilderness' expedition to try and find a North Pacific right whale is timely is an understatement," he said. "We are talking about one of the rarest whales in the world and most people have never heard of them. We need action now. We need Kevin Campion and his team to bring attention to these whales so we can save them, before it is too late."

During the expedition, Deep Green Wilderness will continue filming for a documentary that follows their search for the right whale: "Right Over The Edge: In Search of the North Pacific Right Whale."

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