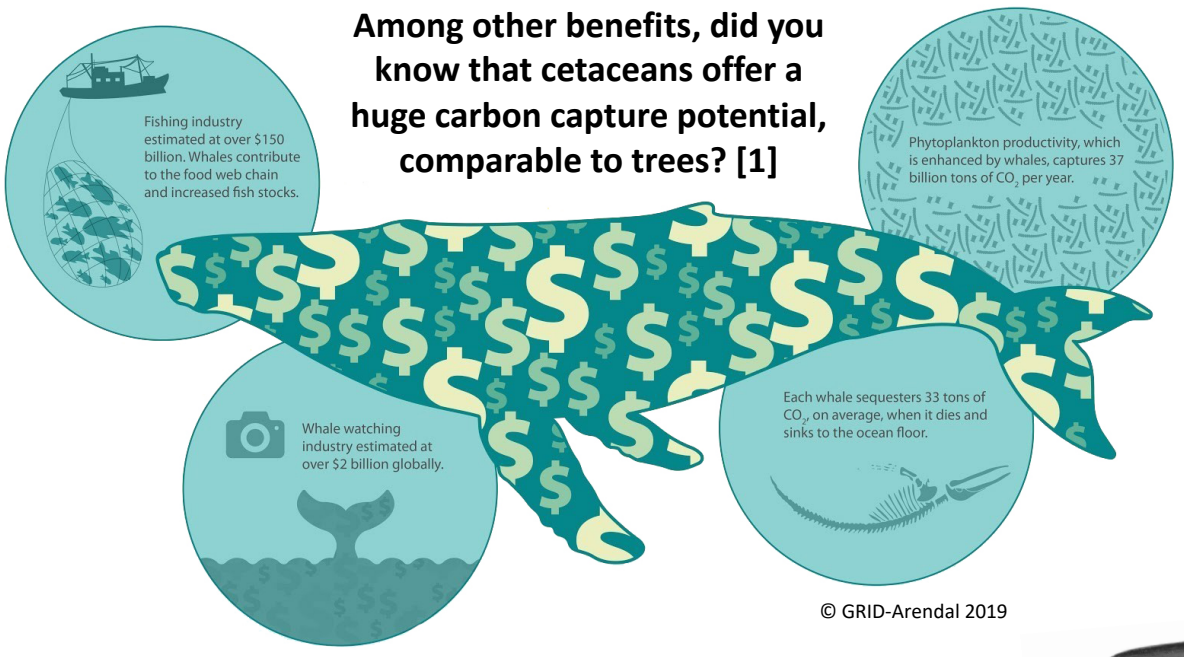
Improving cetacean conservation through understanding species' preferences

By Jack Ashton

Among other benefits, did you know that cetaceans offer a huge carbon capture potential, comparable to trees? [1]



Unfortunately, even though they play an important role in our fight against climate change, it is exactly that which poses their greatest threat

So, how can we improve their conservation?

A starting point is to understand a species' environmental preferences to tailor conservation efforts to them, as we cannot generalise our efforts for all species

My study focused on a population of fin whales in the Bay of Biscay → I found that they prefer deep water with low chlorophyll concentrations → This directly correlated to conditions present in Bay of Biscay abyssal plain → Which suggests that conservation should be targeted to this hotspot to preserve fin whales here

But, how can this help to conserve Cornish fin whales, and other cetaceans?

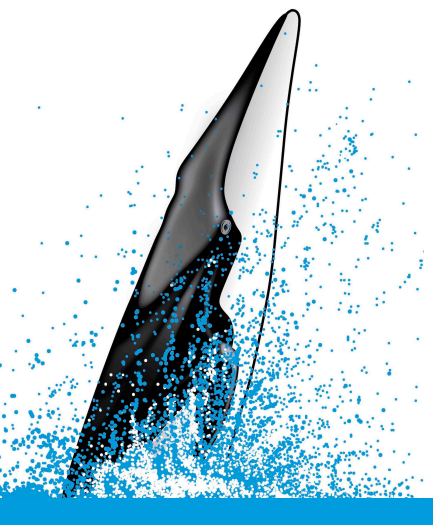
We can use it as a template for fin whales off Cornwall, or replicate the study for Cornwall's 12 cetacean species [2]

So we can → Understand how climate change affects cetaceans; allowing us to avoid some strandings, like the starved 19.25m fin whale which sadly washed up on the Lizard in February

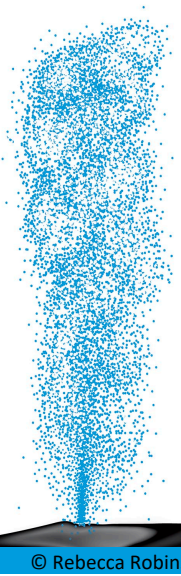
So we can → Identify important conservation areas for Cornish cetaceans

So we can → Identify hotspots to inform ships to take more care as, for example, fin whale are struck more frequently than any other great whale [3]

What is the wider context of this improved conservation?



- Retains our Cornish cetaceans - because after all, who doesn't love seeing them?
- It can help to keep food webs around the world stable and productive
- Retains the carbon capture potential that cetaceans offer



[1] Chami, R., Cosimano, T., Fullenkamp, C. and Oztosun, S. (2019). Nature's Solution to Climate Change. *Finance & Development,* 56(4).
[2] Cornwallmammalgroup.org. 2020. [online] Available at: <https://www.cornwallmammalgroup.org/mammals-a-z> [Accessed 7 April 2020].
[3] Carwardine, M. and Camm, M. (2019). *Handbook of Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises*. London: Bloomsbury.