

## **Port Orford gray whale foraging ecology internship**

Leigh Torres, Ph.D.

Associate Professor; Oregon Sea Grant Extension

Geospatial Ecology of Marine Megafauna Lab (GEMM Lab) Department of Fisheries & Wildlife, Marine Mammal Institute Oregon State University, Hatfield Marine Science Center

[Leigh.Torres@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Leigh.Torres@oregonstate.edu)

**Project description:** During the summers of 2015 to 2021 the [GEMM Lab at OSU](#) has conducted research to understand the foraging ecology of gray whales in Port Orford, and we are planning to do it again in 2022. Our research goals are to understand how and where whales find food. We are looking for a motivated, interested and outgoing OSU undergraduate student to help us with this project from July 18 through August 27. The OSU undergrad will join a team led by an OSU graduate student, and three other interns. The OSU undergrad will help with all aspects of data collection and management, field logistics, and lab work. Interested students should be comfortable working in a kayak and at heights (on a cliff side), be happy to start the day early to collect data, be able to work as part of a team, be willing to work long days, be eager to learn new ideas and skills, be ready to contribute ideas and communicate thoughts, and be excited to learn about marine ecology in coastal Oregon. Through this 6-week internship, students will learn scientific methodology, sampling and data collection protocols, ecological principles, leadership skills, quantitative data analysis methods, and science communication skills.

**Covid-19 plans:** While we hope that the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us by mid-July 2022, we realize this may not be the case and have Covid-19 mitigation plans in place to reduce the risk of virus transmission. We successfully followed these mitigation plans in 2020 and 2021 allowing us to carry out a successful field season.

**Field work methods:** On all good weather days (low winds, low swell, no fog) part of the field team (2 people) tracks whales from a cliff-top location above the port while the other part of the field team (2 people) navigate a research kayak to sampling locations to deploy a Go-Pro camera system and/or conduct zooplankton net tows to assess prey availability. The following video was made by an intern from the 2018 field season and is a good representation of what a 'day in the life' of the field season is like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhgutfz8PGY>

### **Internship schedule:**

July 18 - 29: These two weeks of the internship will be a training period for the whole field team, where the grad student will teach the other team members the field methods. Additionally, the whole team will participate in a 1-day kayak training course, become familiar with safety protocols, take a First Aid course, and become comfortable with all data collection and management methods. It is critical that all field interns attend this training period.

July 30 – Aug 27: After the training period, the field team will collect data over a 4-week period on whale movements, behavior and prey availability. Interns will operate theodolites, cameras, computers, GoPros, zooplankton sampling gear, GPS, a time-depth recorder, a Secchi disk, and a

research kayak. After all days collecting data, all interns will assist in data entry and preliminary data analysis in the lab.

August 27: At the conclusion of the project, the field team will facilitate a public presentation at the Port Orford Field Station to present the project and results, and discuss their experience.

#### **Expectations of interns:**

- Interns should be prepared to be a part of the research team for the full 6-week period, including weekends. Days off will be dictated by weather patterns and data collection needs, with rest days allocated regularly (at most, 10 days of working straight) but unpredictably.
- Many days will start early in the morning (6 am) to take advantage of calm weather in the early mornings. End time of work days will be variable and based on field logistics and data management, but will often be in the mid/late afternoon (3/4 pm)
- Interns are expected to assist with data entry and sample processing back in the lab after a day in the field, or on days when not field work is conducted.
- Each field team participant will contribute to the GEMM Lab blog at least once, regarding their experience.

#### **Previous intern blog posts:**

<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2020/08/31/what-is-a-scientist/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2020/08/24/new-experiences-new-emotions-new-skills/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2020/08/18/questions-that-drive-my-research-curiosity/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2019/08/26/a-series-of-short-stories-from-a-field-season-in-port-orford/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2019/08/20/intricacies-of-zooplankton-species-identification/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2019/08/12/fieldwork-experience-as-a-gemm-lab-intern/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2018/09/03/looking-through-the-scope-a-world-of-small-marine-bugs/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2018/08/27/breaching-new-discoveries-about-gray-whales-in-oregon/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2018/08/20/where-the-wild-things-are/>  
<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gemmlab/2018/08/13/cold-fingers-and-carabiners/>

**Compensation:** The intern will be paid hourly during the internship at a rate of \$15.25/hr for an estimated 240 regular hours and 36 overtime hours. Housing and food costs at the Port Orford field station will also be provided. (If needed, wetsuit, booties and PFDs for kayak work will be provided).

**Applications:** OSU undergrads entering their junior or senior years are eligible to apply. All materials requested below should be submitted by **March 18, 2022** to:

[Leigh.Torres@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Leigh.Torres@oregonstate.edu)

1. A one or two page résumé that includes your name, contact information (including phone and email address), GPA, and educational history. The résumé should also detail your work and volunteer experience, particularly as it relates to marine science.
2. A personal statement in essay style not to exceed 1,000 words which includes:
  - one or two paragraphs that describes your personal/professional/academic background and skills, including your interests and activities as they relate to marine science
  - one or two paragraphs about your academic and professional goals, including your plans following graduation

- one paragraph on how you think this experience would help you reach these goals
3. One letter of recommendation from an academic advisor/professor who know you and your work well.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee and notifications made by April 4, 2022.