



GUEST PRESENTATION

Presenter: Veronica F. Frans

Title: ***A whale of a tale: using local ecological knowledge to investigate baleen whale recovery and distribution around the Falkland Islands***

Affiliation: South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute, Stanley, Falkland Islands

Room: Murie 130 at 12:15 – 13:00

Abstract:

Baleen whale populations have increased around the world after the end of commercial whaling in the 1980s. In the Falkland Islands, anecdotes from local inhabitants tell of an increase in whale sightings after an almost complete absence. However, no long-term monitoring exists to assess such recovery. With increasing maritime activities around the Islands, local managers need to understand the status and distribution of baleen whales to avoid impeding the potential recovery process. In the absence of scientific data, we collected local ecological knowledge (LEK) to assess whether whale numbers are increasing. This information was combined with all existing capture, opportunistic and survey records to compare historical and contemporary species composition and map whale sighting hotspots. The study provided first-time evidence on the return of the whales in the Falkland Islands' waters. These sighting records were then modeled against the environment to predict potential distribution to inform marine spatial planning and future monitoring efforts. The use of LEK is highlighted here as a useful way to gain a better understanding of changes in the status of threatened species when no scientific monitoring has been conducted.

