

Right Whales Sighted Off Iceland

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In June, the Husavik Whale Center reported that observers on a Sea Tours whale-watching vessel sighted right whales about 52 miles off the west coast of Iceland. The sighting occurred as the observers were looking for blue whales. Videotapes were taken of the whales and are currently being examined for possible matches with the New England Aquarium's right whale catalog.

Right whales are rarely seen off Iceland, and these sightings are the first from a commercial whale-watching trip. Only two other right whales have been reported off Iceland in the last 15 years. Phil Clapham of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center notes that these whales were identified as #1718 and #2260 in the New England Aquarium catalog. The former was seen off Iceland in 1987 and in only one other place –

Roseway Basin off southeast Nova Scotia – in 1989. The latter was seen off Iceland in 1992; it, too, was only seen in one other place – the Great South Channel off Massachusetts in 1998. The last right whale to be killed off Iceland was taken by Norwegian whalers in 1902.

A team from the New England Aquarium also sighted one right whale on July 14 after departing in early July for a two-week cruise off Greenland and Iceland in search of right whales. The area appears to have been favored by right whales during the era when they were hunted commercially. It is a different kind of environment for North Atlantic right whales than the coastal waters of the U.S. and Canada, with waters over a mile deep and little in the way of pollution, ship traffic and fishing gear.

MRC wishes you safe and happy holidays!

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