

Whales, seals used as ocean reporters

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A Japanese university has begun attaching cameras and sensors to seals and whales as part of an investigation of the ocean environment.

Since male elephant seals swim up to about 1,800 miles looking for food and whales dive to depths of about 3,200 feet, the experiment is expected to provide a significant amount of data on ocean pollution and facilitate understanding of marine ecosystems, the Mainichi Shimbun reported Monday.

The University of Tokyo's Ocean Research Institute says the use of migratory marine animals that cover a wide area should dramatically increase the amount of data.

At present, researchers are operating sensors attached to elephant seals breeding off the coast of California, blue whales living in the eastern Pacific Ocean, and sperm whales that appear in the seas near Japan.

The smallest sensor is about the size of a crayon, measuring about 2 inches in length and weighing 1 ounce. It takes measurements every few seconds of the water temperature and depth, amount of light in the water, the ocean currents and amounts of zooplankton in the area. Cameras attached to the sea creatures snap photographs about every 30 seconds. Their location is recorded using the Global Positioning System.

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