

No food for hungry gray whales

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A Canadian researcher says gray whales in the eastern Pacific are facing starvation.

The whales, hunted to the brink of extinction in the 1850s and early 1900s, were removed from the endangered species list in 1994, The (London) Independent said Thursday.

"I went down to Mexico this winter and my colleagues and I were finding whales that were starving," said researcher William Megill, whose work is funded by Britain's Earthwatch group.

The whales, which numbered about 25,000 in 1993, are now suffering from "skinny whale syndrome" and their numbers have fallen to about 18,000.

Researchers say the warmer El Nino weather of 1998 and 1999 reduced oxygen levels, resulting in fewer tiny crustaceans for whales to eat.

Eastern Pacific gray whales eat small shrimp called amphipods, which live at the bottom of the Bering Sea. The shrimp appear to have vanished, the newspaper said.

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