

New orca calf seen among Puget Sound's critically endangered killer whales

January 14 2019, by Lynda V. Mapes



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A new calf has been born to the critically endangered southern resident killer whales, researchers confirmed.

The [calf](#) was born to L77, said Ken Balcomb, founding director of the Center for Whale Research. He confirmed the birth in a text to The Seattle Times Friday. He estimated the calf is several weeks old.

Center staff first saw the calf Friday morning at the eastern end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

"It's great news," Balcomb said, adding the calf looks healthy.

It is the first known birth to the southern residents since Tahlequah, or J35, gave birth to a calf in July that lived only a half-hour.

Tahlequah drew worldwide attention when she carried the dead infant for 17 days and more than 1,000 miles, refusing to let it go.

Any [birth](#) in the southern resident population is big news because the orcas that frequent Puget Sound in the J, K and L pods are critically endangered. There are only 74 left, with three [whales](#) lost last year.

The center also was observing K25 Friday, a southern resident whale known to be in poor body condition. If conditions allow, the center is attempting to get an update on that whale's status.

K25 is doing poorly after the death of his mother K13 in 2017. Mother orcas preferentially feed their sons and K25 has been getting thinner and thinner—so thin that Balcomb has said he is concerned he may not last the summer.

J17, Tahlequah's mother, is also so thin as to cause similar concern.

Balcomb cautioned about getting too attached to the baby whale as survival rates are about 50 percent. The southern residents have not successfully reproduced in three years.

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