

# Another new orca baby born to J pod

September 28 2020, by Lynda V. Mapes

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Another baby orca has been born to J pod, the Center for Whale Research confirmed Friday morning. It's the second calf born this month for the endangered southern resident orcas that frequent Puget Sound.

"We confirm that there is a new calf in J pod and the mother is J41,"

Ken Balcomb, the founding director of the center, wrote in a text message to The Seattle Times on Friday morning.

"We have to await the whales' return to determine its health condition and hopefully determine its success. It is important to note that the observation was in Canada and we could not be there due to covid restrictions."

Center observer Mark Malleson caught up with the whales near Sheringham, British Columbia, Balcomb wrote. The whales were very spread out, foraging, and could not be located before dark.

J35, the orca also known as Tahlequah, gave birth to a male calf on Sept. 4. Mother and baby were seen this week romping and feeding. Tahlequah raised worldwide concern in 2018 when her calf died shortly after birth and she carried it for 17 days and more than 1,000 miles.

This is the fourth birth to the southern residents since 2019. In such a small population, every calf is celebrated. There are now 74 southern residents in the J, K, and L pods.

The orcas face three main threats to their survival: boat noise and vessel disturbance; pollution; and lack of food, especially [chinook salmon](#).

The birth of the latest baby was witnessed by professional naturalists Talia Goodyear and Leah Vanderwiell, along with customers aboard the Orca Spirit Adventures vessel Pacific Explorer, according to a news release from the Pacific Whale Watch Association, which represents commercial tour operators on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border.

According to Goodyear: "We spotted who we soon identified to be J41 just southwest of Race Rocks. She appeared to be alone at the time and stayed very close to the surface for a few minutes. After going under for

several minutes, she reappeared, and this time it looked like she was pushing something with her rostrum. She surfaced like this 3 or 4 times."

It took them a little while to figure out what was going on. Was this tragic news? A repeat of mother orca Tahlequah pushing a dead calf? Was it a transient or Bigg's killer whale tackling a seal?

They soon realized the mother [orca](#) was helping the baby by holding it up on her head to get its first few breaths, "...at which point the little one started surfacing on its own," according to Vanderwiel. "It appeared to be a rambunctious little bundle of baby ...

"It was an emotional time as we processed what was happening in front of us. It took a few minutes to realize what was actually happening, but then it was pure excitement realizing that it was a birth and the baby was very alive and boisterous."

The second birth to J pod in just a few weeks' time is "certainly cause for celebration," said Deborah Giles, biologist for the University of Washington's Center for Conservation Biology. She leads research on the orcas' scat, which is a gold mine of information on their health.

Reproduction in the southern resident pods is limited by lack of food, especially chinook salmon, according to research detailed in a 2017 paper. Now is the time for the region to work to make sure there is enough chinook for the southern residents, including the lactating and expecting mothers, Giles said.

It is not just the total number of chinook that matter. The whales need big chinook. The fish also need to be in the orcas' feeding range, where they have learned through generations uncounted to successfully target chinook. That includes the Salish Sea, the transboundary waters between the U.S. and Canada, and the mouth of the Columbia, where the

southern residents return again and again for succulent spring chinook.

"They need those big ones, those three-, four-, and five-year-old chinook," Giles said. "For recovery, these whales need high-quality, abundant salmon throughout their range, and throughout the year. Those lipid-rich, spring-run [chinook](#) they preferentially loop the mouth of the Columbia for are vital for this population of [whales](#)."

As the world watched Tahlequah carry her dead calf around the Salish Sea in 2018, and saw her relative J50 waste away, many people were galvanized to fight for the orcas that are so special to Puget Sound - the only orcas that in winter cruise all the way into the waters of downtown Seattle.

Giles said she hopes the positive news of these recent births can inspire people to redouble their efforts on behalf of the [southern residents](#): "This is just exactly what we need in 2020."

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