



**AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION
OF SMALL CETACEANS OF THE
BALTIC, NORTH EAST ATLANTIC,
IRISH AND NORTH SEAS**

ASCOBANS/AC30/Inf.4.2

31 July 2026

30th MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Bonn, Germany, 1–3 September 2026
Agenda Item 4.2

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON CETACEAN CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING

(Prepared by the Chair of the Cetacean Culture Working Group)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON CETACEAN CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING

A theme issue 'Animal culture: conservation in a changing world' compiled and edited by Philippa Brakes, Lucy Aplin, Emma L. Carroll, Alison L. Greggor, Andrew Whiten and Ellen C. Garland was published in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B in May 2025.

A selection of articles from the theme issue:

Philippa Brakes, Lucy Aplin, Emma L. Carroll, Alison L. Greggor, Andrew Whiten, Ellen C. Garland; Animal culture: conservation in a changing world. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 1 May 2025; 380 (1925): 20240127. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0127>

Ana Eguiguren, Isabel Avila, Sarah Mesnick, Mauricio Cantor, Taylor Hersh, Héctor Pérez-Puig, Patricia Rosero, Luke Rendell, Hal Whitehead, Constanza Rojas, Juan Jose Alava; Integrating cultural dimensions in sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) conservation: threats, challenges and solutions. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 1 May 2025; 380 (1925): 20240142. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0142>

Ellen C. Garland, Peter Corkeron, Michael J. Noad, Briana Abrahms, Jenny A. Allen, Rochelle Constantine, Luke Rendell, Renata S. Sousa-Lima, Kathleen M. Stafford, Emma L. Carroll; Culture and conservation in baleen whales. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 1 May 2025; 380 (1925): 20240133. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0133>

Taylor A. Hersh, Daiane S. Marcondes, Gabriel F. Fonseca, João V. S. Valle-Pereira, Michaela A. Kratofil, Alexandre M. S. Machado, Shanan Atkins, Kyra R. Bankhead, Kiera McGarvey, Muhammad Mahmudur Rahman, Stephane P. G. de Moura, Fernanda Fecci, Mauricio Cantor; Ecology and conservation of socially learned foraging tactics in odontocetes. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 1 May 2025; 380 (1925): 20240134. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0134>

Other recent publications:

Brakes, Philippa and Whitehead, Hal. "13 Culture and Conservation". The Evolution of Cetacean Societies: Uncovering the Social Complexity of Whales and Dolphins, edited by Darren P. Croft, Andrew D. Foote, Ellen C. Garland and Stephanie L. King, University of Chicago Press, 2026, pp. 330-352. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226840567-014>

Hersh, Taylor A., Alexiadou, Paraskevi, Brotons, José María, Cerdà, Margalida, Pirotta, Enrico, Frantzis, Alexandros, Rendell, Luke; Dialect variation in Mediterranean sperm whales shows evidence of cultural evolution in an isolated population. *Proc Biol Sci* 1 June 2026; 293 (2073): 20260165. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2026.0165>

Hersh, Taylor A., Filatova, Olga A. and Garland, Ellen C. "12 Vocal Cultures in Cetaceans". The Evolution of Cetacean Societies: Uncovering the Social Complexity of Whales and Dolphins, edited by Darren P. Croft, Andrew D. Foote, Ellen C. Garland and Stephanie L. King, University of Chicago Press, 2026, pp. 308-329. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226840567-013>

Wild, Sonja and Rendell, Luke. "11 Cultural Transmission of Foraging Behavior in Cetaceans". The Evolution of Cetacean Societies: Uncovering the Social Complexity of Whales and Dolphins, edited by Darren P. Croft, Andrew D. Foote, Ellen C. Garland and Stephanie L. King, University of Chicago Press, 2026, pp. 281-307. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226840567-012>

Online resources:

Animal Culture and Social Learning: <https://www.cms.int/conservation-priorities/conservation-needs/animal-culture-and-social-learning>

Animal Cultures: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/17f47e8f84694372a43d579cfb69aab1>

CMS Resolution and Decisions

CMS Resolution 11.23 (Rev.COP15) Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Learning was revised in March 2026. <https://www.cms.int/document/conservation-implications-animal-culture-and-social-learning>

Decisions adopted at COP15:

15.220 Directed to Parties

Parties are encouraged to consider the insights from the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning to enhance work under CMS instruments, emphasizing the conservation value of 'cultural capacity' in accordance with national circumstances and capability.

15.221 Directed to Parties, IGOs and NGOs

Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to provide financial and technical support to the Expert Group on Animal Culture, specifically in relation to hosting an in-person workshop during the next triennium as foreseen in Decision 15.222.

15.222 Directed to the Scientific Council, through its Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning

The Scientific Council, through its Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning, subject to the availability of resources, is requested to:

- a) promote the practical application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management by working to:
 - i. assess and provide advice on possible shortcuts for incorporating social learning into management, complementing traditional management techniques, including developing advice on phylogenetic inference;
 - ii. continue to identify and compile instances in which social learning may be involved in animal behaviours and mitigation measures for human–wildlife conflict and explore opportunities to collaborate with the IUCN Human–Wildlife Conflict & Co-existence specialist group;
 - iii. conduct a review, in collaboration with the Working Group on Climate Change, of any examples of social learning-related changes in behaviour as a result of climate change that increase human–wildlife conflict;
 - iv. provide advice on the potential link with Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and other area-based conservation tools that identify sites or seascapes of biodiversity importance;
 - v. explore and prepare a report on the impacts of removals on social structure and cultural capacity, focusing on where it is an identified threat;
 - vi. investigate and provide advice on the potential of social impact assessment methodologies for understanding impacts of human activities on social learning, social structure and culture in migratory species;
- b) convene an expert workshop to:
 - i. provide best practice advice on identifying specific conservation targets in different settings;
 - ii. categorize and develop parameters for designating cultural units in different migratory species;
 - iii. distil practical advice that can be implemented by relevant managers and decisionmakers;
 - iv. suggest any further culture-based Concerted Actions;

- c) develop user-friendly guidance for scientists on the practical aspects of detecting social learning, based on the special issue, Animal culture: conservation in a changing world;
- d) identify for which CMS instruments animal culture and social learning are likely to be most relevant, compile examples from the special issue, Animal culture: conservation in a changing world, into a document or brochure outlining the relevance for species covered by these instruments, and make use of upcoming meetings to bring this to their attention;
- e) seek to convene a workshop in collaboration with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Human–Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group and the IUCN CEESP-SSC Conservation of Animal Cultures Task Force to further explore human–wildlife interactions in connection with social learning;
- f) engage in the five-year initiative (2025-2030) led by IUCN to advance the consideration of animal culture in guiding conservation policy and practice.

15.223 Directed to the Scientific Council

The Scientific Council is requested to review the work under CMS to date on animal culture and social learning, including consideration of its relevance to implementation of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032 and to provide advice to COP16 on the direction of further work on this subject under CMS.

15.224 Directed to the Secretariat

The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of resources:

- a) convene an in-person workshop to assist the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture with the tasks outlined in Decision 15.222;
- b) support the Scientific Council and its Expert Working Group with the dissemination of guidance developed as foreseen in Decision 15.222;
- c) support the Scientific Council with implementation of Decision 15.223;
- d) approach the Secretariat of the GEO BON global biodiversity observation network to explore opportunities for linking work on animal culture and social learning with the network.