



## Free Corky Campaign Factsheet

### Corky's Story

**Corky is a record-holder, the longest held captive orca in all history. It is more than 37 years since she was forcibly removed from her natural environment and taken to the harsh reality of a concrete tank. WDCS is calling for her to be returned to her family in the wild ocean!**

*Corky is a female orca (killer whale).* She was captured on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1969, when she was about four years old. From photos taken at the capture scene and from knowledge about the composition and behaviour of orca families, researchers have been able to work out which group of whales is Corky's family and, most importantly, who her mother is. Unfortunately, her mother, Stripe, died in 2000 before they could be reunited; however, Corky has sisters and cousins that she has never met. Corky has spent more than 37 years in captivity. Until 1987, she was held at Marineland Palos Verdes, near Los Angeles and was then transferred to Sea World, San Diego, where she is now. This year (2006) marks the 37th anniversary of Corky's capture and imprisonment in captivity for the entertainment industry.

*In 1969, Corky's world suddenly changed.* Concrete walls replaced the cliffs, rocks, sand, and caves of the vast and almost limitless ocean. Suddenly, the four walls of her tank represented the new boundary of her world. There were no longer any passageways, nooks and crannies to explore. Choices were limited. Gone were the familiar sounds of the sea. Instead, there was the constant drone of filtration pumps, and, when any of the whales called, their sounds reverberated off the barren walls. There were no waves, no currents, no fish to chase and hunt, no porpoises to play with - everything had changed forever.

*At about 11 years of age, Corky began to mature sexually.* On 28<sup>th</sup> February 1977, Corky delivered her first calf, a male. This was the first live orca to be born in captivity. Orky, Corky's cousin and also the father of all her calves, helped the calf to the surface after the difficult birth. The situation grew tense when the calf failed to nurse. The staff intervened, drained the pool, and force fed the calf several times a day. Despite these efforts, the calf continued to lose weight, and eventually died of pneumonia. He lived for just 16 days. Corky has now been pregnant seven times. The longest any of her calves lived was 46 days. Finally, at the youthful age of 21, Corky stopped ovulating.

***In the wild***, Corky would probably have at least a couple of calves by now. A female orca in the wild might look forward to about 25 reproductive years and have perhaps four to six offspring.

***In December, 1986, 17 years after Corky's arrival***, Marineland and its surrounding lands were purchased by Sea World's corporate owner, the U.S. publisher Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, for a rumoured \$23 million. Corky was then transferred to Sea World in San Diego where she became Sea World's main performer, "Shamu".

***Shamu is the Sea World trade name for its orcas***. The name is passed from performer to performer. Corky's physical condition has fluctuated over the years. At one point, Sea World listed her condition as "poor", perhaps because her kidneys were not functioning well. Her lower teeth are worn and she is almost blind in one eye. Sea World considers Corky as an "old" animal and tells visitors that orcas only live to about 35 years. They used to say 30 years. For a while, Sea World even decreased the number of shows Corky did, but now she is back doing a full schedule. When she is not performing, Corky is held in one of the back pools with seven other orcas. She spends most of her time simply circling her tank.

***During her time in captivity, Corky has experienced some social difficulties***, most notably with an Icelandic orca named Kandu V who appeared to be jealous of Corky. There had been a lot of tension, on and off, between the two females. Then, in August 1989, just as their public show was beginning, Kandu rushed out from the back pool and charged at Corky. In the attack, Kandu fractured her jaw, a bone fragment severed an artery and she bled to death. No one had ever seen or heard of an orca attacking another orca before. Kandu's son, Orkid, was just one year old at the time and, in an odd twist of fate, Corky became his surrogate mother.

***Back in the wild***, Corky's family lives on. The pod once had 18 members but six were removed in another capture in 1968. These six are now all dead. Of the six taken in 1969, only Corky survives. Slowly, over the years, as their fortunes have waxed and waned, the wild pod has been rejuvenated. In 1999 there were 13 members, which was about the same number as in 1969. Currently, the A5 pod consists of just 10 whales, the youngest born in the summer of 2006. The group still loves to hunt the big spring salmon and they still continue to travel the waters of Johnstone Strait, Blackfish Sound and the rest of the Inside Passage. But they have never been seen near Pender Harbour since the orca captures that occurred there in 1969. It seems that orcas, like elephants, have long memories.

***Corky still remembers her family***. She visibly shook and vocalised poignantly when a tape recording of her family's calls were played to her in 1993. Corky still 'speaks' the same dialect as her family, the so-called A5 pod.

***Corky deserves to be free.***

**Source of information: The Free Corky Project, Orcalab, Hanson Island, British Columbia, Canada**

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### Orcas in Captivity

Killer whales, more properly known as orcas, have been kept in captivity since 1961; helpless victims of a blatantly commercial experiment which has seen dozens of wild orcas plucked from their families and forced to live in artificial social groupings which bear scant resemblance to their natural order. Unaware of their plight, millions of people flock each year to watch the orca show, seduced by the extravagant promises of the display industry.

For years, the display industry has employed a variety of arguments in its attempt to justify keeping orcas captive. We have been led to believe that captivity benefits both onlookers and animals alike: entertaining and educating audiences whilst, at the same time, providing a comfortable life for the captives. But, as long-term research into wild orca populations increases our knowledge of the species, so the glaring disparities between the lives of the captives and the lives of wild orcas becomes all too apparent.

#### **The Facts**

- At least 135 orcas have been taken into captivity from the wild since 1961. One hundred and seventeen (117) are now dead (86%).
- Of the 117 which died, the average length of survival in captivity was under six years.
- Most captives die before they reach their early 20s, yet in the wild, females may live as long as 80 years or more.
- As of May 2006, a total of 45 orcas (17 wild-caught and 28 captive-born) are held in 13 marine parks in four countries.
- Of 69 known pregnancies in captivity since 1968, only 29 calves (42%) have survived.
- Sea World owns 21 orcas, 46% of the world-wide captive total.

## Capture

**1964 - 1976 Washington State/British Columbia: Between 275-307 orcas captured, 56 taken into captivity, 53 now dead.** Method of capture: whales ambushed as they swam into harbours or narrow, shallow water inlets. By stringing a net across the mouth of the inlet, the entire pod could effectively be entrapped. Explosives were sometimes used to frighten the pod towards the shore.

**1976 - 1989 Iceland: 65 orcas captured, 55 taken into captivity, 34 dead.** Method of capture: Encirclement in purse seine nets

**1972 - to-date Japan: 28 orcas captured, 19 taken into captivity, 14 dead.** Method of capture: harpooning and herding into nets. Attempts may be made to wrestle the whales into submission by riding on their backs. In February 1999, a group of ten orcas were taken near Taiji, Wakayama prefecture by fishermen who encircled them out at sea and used fast boats and explosives to drive the group into the bay.

**2002 - to-date Russia: 37 orcas captured, 1 taken into captivity, 1 dead.** The Russian Government has issued permits for the capture of up to ten orcas in its Far East waters, for public display in national and international aquaria. There was no previous experience of capturing and keeping orcas in Russia. The orca taken into captivity and transported 7,000 miles to a facility near the Black Sea died a month later.

## Life in Captivity

**Movement:** Orca expert, Erich Hoyt, calculated in 1992 that, based upon the daily travels of a wild orca pod, the minimum volume of water traversed in an average 24 hours would total 6,006,000,000 cubic feet, containing over 45,302,778,000 gallons (over 9,000 times larger the sum of the interconnecting pools at Sea World Orlando or San Diego).

**Feeding:** All orcas in captivity are fed dead fish, usually herring. Wild-caught orcas often show considerable difficulty adjusting to the new and highly artificial feeding regime. Marine parks defend the practice of providing dead fish on the grounds that manual feeding by park staff allows a measured quantity of fish to be fed to each animal. In reality, probably the main obstacle to providing live prey is the fact that the sterile, chlorinated waters of the pool kills fish very quickly.

**Acoustics:** Professor Hal Whitehead's 1990 paper on captive cetaceans compared the experience of a 'highly acoustic cetacean... [such as an orca]... living in a tank with acoustically reflective walls, to that of a visually oriented animal, like a human, living captive in a room covered with mirrors on all walls and the floor. The experience is likely to be profoundly disturbing, especially over the long term.' Whilst scientists are unable to agree upon whether confinement affects cetacean hearing and vocalising behaviour, it is only logical to suppose that the smooth concrete walls of the tank inhibit the orca's natural acoustic abilities, designed for open ocean living.

**Relationships:** Orcas are, above all, social animals. There have never been complete pods exhibited in captivity. Sea World's penchant for moving orcas around from park to park on a regular basis, can only cause additional problems. No sooner have individuals made some sort of adaptation to their pool companions, than the balance is upset with the removal of one whale and replacement with a totally new and strange animal. Worse than this, several orcas are still being

kept solitary from members of their own species, an inexcusable situation, given the extent of our knowledge about this supremely social animal.

**Survival Rates:** Although Sea World continues to assert that survival has improved in recent years, the fact remains that most captives die before their early twenties. Equally damning, more orcas have died at Sea World parks in the last decade than in the preceding **two** decades, with 11 deaths between 1965-1985 and 14 between 1986-1996. In the last decade (1997 – 2006), approximately nine orcas have died at Sea World parks, including a pregnant orca and her unborn calf.

**Stress:** It is estimated that stress may be a contributing factor in as many as 50% of captive deaths. Erich Hoyt writes that 'examining the known causes of death in captive orcas, stress was a possible predisposing factor in 38 of 74 deaths.' An orca's innate biological conditioning cannot prepare it for the unnatural traumas of capture, transport and confinement, imposed by humans.

**Aggression:** Aggressive behaviour amongst orcas belonging to the same pod is rarely witnessed in the wild, yet aggression between orcas or towards trainers is a disturbing trend in marine parks. In 1989, Kandu, the dominant female at Sea World's San Diego Park rammed Corky in front of a stadium full of horrified spectators. Kandu fractured her jaw and ruptured an artery, she died 45 minutes later. It is possible that Kandu's attack was motivated by jealousy of Corky's attempts to help to care for the calf.

The orcas at Sea World have also attacked their trainers. WDCS notes that it knows of no cases of aggression displayed by orcas in the wild towards humans.

Recent incidences at Sea World parks include: Sea World, Texas (2004); Sea World, Orlando (2005) and Sea World, San Diego (2006). In all three recent incidences, trainers were harmed during the elaborate in-water shows, either by the performing orca biting and/or dragging the trainer underwater. The most recent incident at the San Diego Park saw the trainer attacked in front of a horrified crowd. He eventually managed to escape and was taken to hospital, reportedly with a broken foot.

**Source of information: Williams, V (1999) Captive Orcas 'Dying to Entertain You' The Full Story; A report for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society.**

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### **[Orcas in the Wild](#)**

*Orcinus orca*, common name killer whale or orca, belong to the order cetacea which includes all whales, dolphins and porpoises. They are found in all the oceans of the world, particularly cooler temperate and polar regions. The orca is one of the most wide-ranging mammals on earth.

#### **Community living**

Researchers in British Columbia and Washington State have identified three distinct forms of orcas which fundamentally differ in many aspects of their social organisation, behaviour, appearance, diet and even dialect. The first group, by far the most studied, are known as residents. Residents live in stable social groups, known as pods, which typically contain between 10 - 20 members.

A second distinct form of orcas are known as 'transients' and appear to occupy a much wider home range, travel in much smaller groups of one to five individuals. They vocalise much less frequently than the residents and dive for longer periods, spending much more time underwater.

Although the territorial waters of transients and residents frequently overlap, the two groups apparently do not interbreed or even interact socially. Indeed, they often seem uncomfortable in each others' presence and appear either to ignore or directly avoid the other. Residents have recently been observed to 'chase off' the transients.

A third form, the 'offshores' has recently been identified, travelling in groups of 30 – 60 individuals. This little-studied population has been observed in the Pacific Ocean, around 24 - 40km (15-25 miles) off Vancouver Island.

#### **Family ties**

Orca society is incredibly complex and very highly evolved. Orcas have come to be described as amongst the most closely-bonded animals on earth. Social structure seems to run entirely along

maternal lines. Typically, each matrilineal group consists of a mature female and all her offspring, including adult sons who remain with their mothers for life. Adult daughters and their offspring also travel in this extended family group, which may span three or even four generations and contain as many as nine whales. One or more matrilineal groups which are always observed travelling together are known as a subpod.

A 'pod' is a larger social unit, an extended family group composed of several subpods and most number between 10 - 20 individuals. Fathers are conspicuously absent from these pods. Some researchers now believe that calves are the products of matings between pods. This avoids inbreeding, creating and maintaining a healthier gene pool.

Females typically give birth to their first calf at around 14-15 years and will have an average of five calves over roughly a 25 year period. Female lifespan can reach 80 or more years. Male lifespan is shorter, generally a maximum of 50-60 years.

## **Daily activity**

Pod members may spend as much as two-thirds of their time foraging for food, depending upon the time of year and the relative abundance or scarcity of prey species. Individuals tend to spread out, often over areas of several kilometres. By vocalising to keep in touch and working co-operatively together, a pod can systematically sweep an area of fish. Orcas use a highly sophisticated system known as sonar or echolocation when hunting their prey.

After feeding, the pod may decide to rest awhile. Young calves tend to stay close to their mother, often physically touching and appearing to breathe in unison.

Play seems to assume an important role in orca society, probably helping individuals to bond and allowing juveniles to learn social and sexual behaviours from older pod members. The action tends to be fast and furious and can take the form of breaching and spy -hopping above the water and rolling and tail thrashing at the surface. In late summer or early autumn, social gatherings of 100-200 whales are thought to provide the ideal forum for mating to take place.

## **In the Wild:**

- Orcas live in large, closely-knit, highly complex social groups typically numbering 5 - 25 members.
- Members are related by blood and remain together for life.
- The pod may travel as many as 160 km (100 miles) in a day, in a home range of maybe 800 - 1,500 km (500-900 miles).
- They forage for live prey and socialise, rest and play as a cohesive group.
- Free will and freedom of movement characterise their existence.
- They are supremely adapted over centuries to cope with the rigours of life in the wild.

## **In Captivity:**

- From the moment an orca is taken into captivity, this free will and freedom of movement is virtually obliterated. From this moment onwards, humans will mastermind the captive orca's life.
- Home is a bare and largely featureless concrete tank, minuscule compared to their natural ocean habitat.

- Artificially salinated and chlorinated water usually replace natural seawater.
- Captives must learn to accept dead fish.
- Blood-bonds are replaced by forced associations, with orcas from different pods and different oceans being routinely mixed and matched.
- Calves are routinely moved from their mother at a very tender age.
- In 2006, at least six facilities keep a solitary orca.
- Natural daily routines and social interactions are replaced by forced and highly artificial show routines.
- Above all, the orca's quality of life is severely compromised.

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## Free Corky Campaign

### What you can do to help!

- **Tell your friends** about Corky and about other whales and dolphins in captivity. Ask them not to visit dolphinariums when they are on holiday.
- **If you hear** any details about dolphinariums or have photos, send them to WDCS so we can maintain our up-to-date database. If you are aware of plans to develop a dolphinarium anywhere in the world, alert WDCS.
- **Become a member of WDCS.** Your support helps WDCS continue its valuable work.
- **Adopt an Orca** from the WDCS Adopt a Whale programme – it makes an ideal present for a loved one. Help secure a safer future for Corky’s family.
- **Write a polite letter** to Mr August Busch IV, Chief Executive Officer of Anheuser-Busch, owners of Sea World and brewers of Budweiser beer. Ask Mr Busch to implement a plan of action that will set Corky on the road to freedom. The message is simple: “please give Corky a great gift... the chance of a new free life with her relatives back in her natural ocean home.” Send your letters to WDCS and we will forward them on for you.
- **Join WDCS on an “out of the blue” whale-watching tour.** **out of the blue** is WDCS's travel wing, giving people around the world the opportunity to witness the spectacular natural behaviour of whales and dolphins in the wild.. Call **out of the blue** on 01249 449 533 for a brochure or visit [www.wdcs.org/outoftheblue](http://www.wdcs.org/outoftheblue).
- **Get ACTIVE with WDCS.** There are many ways in which you can help WDCS

VOLUNTEER: Join a Local Action Group or volunteer in one of our UK offices (Chippenham, Wiltshire or Spey Bay, Scotland). Distribute our collection boxes or leaflets dispensers. Become a volunteer educational speaker in your area. For more details call 01249 449500 or visit <http://www.wdcs.org/events>.

FUNDRAISE: From organised sponsored parachute jumps and white-water rafting to 'set yourself a challenge' or organising your own fundraising party or event. Go to the [www.wdcs.org/events](http://www.wdcs.org/events) for ideas on the A – Z of fundraising.

- **See whales and dolphins in the wild on a whale-watching tour.** Make sure that the tour operator is responsible and doesn't harass the animals.

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