

Rare gray orca spotted in Puget Sound waters

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Image 1. A gray transient orca wowed onlookers all over Puget Sound, Washington, in April 2020. Its nickname, Tl'uk, means "moon" in Coast Salish. This is a language spoken by some Native Americans in the region. Photo: Howard Garrett/Orca Network/TNS

An orca is getting attention in Puget Sound, Washington. Puget Sound is an area of water. It is next to Seattle and other cities in Washington.

The orca is a lighter color than usual. The orca is gray instead of black. It looks bright in the water.

This orca is part of the transient orca group. They are commonly called killer whales. But they are not actually whales. They are the world's largest dolphins. They eat meat instead of fish. Transient orcas hunt animals like seals and sea lions.

Tl'uk Appeared In April To Great Interest

Howard Garrett works with the Orca Network. The group helps protect orcas in the area. Garrett said that the only unusual thing about the gray orca is his color.

"He stands right out," Garrett said. He took a photo of the orca. "I don't know that there is anything different about him or his family. He seems to be the right size for his age. But he sure glows really bright."

The gray orca is named Tl'uk. It means "moon" in Coast Salish. This is a language spoken by some Native Americans in the region.

Garrett saw the orca on April 7. He and other people were gathered on a dock. The orcas were very close to them.

"They are powerful, graceful, beautiful beings," Garrett said. He liked seeing them near his feet.



Young Tl'uk And Family Hunt Together, Rarely In Puget Sound

Transient orcas are doing well. In 1972, the government banned people from hunting many sea animals. This meant more animals for orcas to eat. The orcas team up to catch big animals such as sea lions. They often hunt close to shore.

Tl'uk's family is not seen much in this area. People usually see the family around the San Juan Islands in Washington. Starting in April, the orcas were seen in waters near Puget Sound.

The gray orca is less than 2 years old. He is the second gray orca seen in these waters. The first gray orca was Chimo. People caught Chimo back when orca hunting was still allowed.

"It is great to see that guy, just amazing," Garrett said about Tl'uk. The orca looks white in the green water. He has a mysterious quality, Garrett said.