

PRESS RELEASE

The Iberian Orca and the Strait of Gibraltar

Iberian orca conservation campaign launches new scientific research in the Strait of Gibraltar and the Gulf of Cádiz

Under authorisation from Spain's Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO), WeWhale has officially launched photo-identification, acoustic and behavioural research to improve scientific knowledge and support the conservation of the Critically Endangered Iberian orca, a population numbering fewer than 30 individuals.

Cádiz, 3 June 2026 – WeWhale is pleased to announce a new phase of its Iberian orca conservation campaign, carried out in collaboration with Iberian Orca Guardians and Sea Shepherd France, with the support of Voluntarios Trafalgar. Under official authorisation from MITECO, the campaign now incorporates photo-identification, acoustic and behavioural studies of the unique Iberian orca population inhabiting the waters of southern Spain.

For several years, the **Save The Iberian Orca** campaign has carried out patrols, monitoring and public awareness activities in the Strait of Gibraltar with a clear objective: to promote coexistence between sailors and Iberian orcas, improve safety at sea, and encourage a more accurate and positive understanding of this unique population.

One of the campaign's core activities is maintaining a regular presence at sea to document the presence of orcas and share relevant information with the boating community whenever the animals are in the area. This helps reduce potential conflicts while promoting safer and more informed navigation.

Alongside this work, the campaign has developed an extensive outreach programme aimed at changing the negative narrative that often surrounds the Iberian orca. As a wild species that has formed part of the Strait of Gibraltar's ecosystem and natural heritage for thousands of years, Iberian orcas should not be viewed as aggressive animals, but rather as highly intelligent marine predators with complex behaviours whose coexistence with human activities requires knowledge, understanding and appropriate management.

Under the official permit granted by Spain's Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO), WeWhale is now adding a new scientific dimension to the campaign through systematic, non-invasive research in the Strait of Gibraltar and the Gulf of Cádiz.

One of the project's main objectives is the photo-identification of individual orcas using the natural markings on their dorsal fins and saddle patches. This work will contribute to a better understanding of the current population size, family structure, movement patterns and habitat use of this small and vulnerable population.

The project will also include acoustic and behavioural studies using hydrophones and standardised observation protocols to investigate vocalisations and behavioural patterns in different contexts.

Together, these studies aim to expand scientific knowledge of the ecology and communication of the Iberian orca through respectful, non-invasive research methods.

The Iberian orca (*Orcinus orca*), closely associated with the migration of Atlantic bluefin tuna through the Strait of Gibraltar and the Gulf of Cádiz, is classified as **Critically Endangered** by the IUCN. With fewer than 30 individuals remaining, obtaining reliable and up-to-date scientific data is a conservation priority.

Janek Andre, Founder and President of WeWhale, said:

"Protecting the Iberian orca requires a combination of science, coexistence and public engagement based on evidence and facts rather than misconceptions. Our goal is to help build a better-informed relationship between people and one of the world's most threatened orca populations."

Cristina Otero Sabio, Scientific Lead at WeWhale, added:

"As scientists, we have the privilege of studying these incredible animals in their natural habitat. But with that privilege comes a responsibility: to give them a voice and help change the narrative surrounding them. Iberian orcas have lived in these waters for thousands of years. They belong here. They are part of our history, our culture and our natural heritage, and we simply cannot afford to lose them. The better we understand them, the better we can protect them and ensure they remain part of these waters for generations to come."

Vicente Cancho, skipper of the research vessel Toñi (WeWhale / Iberian Orca Guardians), said:

"Coexistence in the Strait of Gibraltar is possible. Every season we see first-hand that information, prevention and mutual respect are essential tools for reducing conflict and promoting a safer and more responsible relationship between sailors and orcas."

Fieldwork is already underway and will continue until the end of the year as part of the **Save The Iberian Orca** campaign.

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