

Mysterious Denizens of the Deep: The Northern Bottlenose Whales of the Sable Gully

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The northern bottlenose whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) is a medium sized beaked whale known for their inquisitive nature and deep diving abilities. In the northwest Atlantic, the range of northern bottlenose whales follows the deep (>500m) shelf edge waters from approximately 37.5° N to the low arctic. The distribution of these whales is not continuous, however, and there are at least two genetically distinct populations in Canada: the Scotian Shelf population and a northern population in the Labrador-Davis Strait. Since 1988, the northern bottlenose whales of the Sable Gully, a large submarine canyon and marine protected area 30 km northeast of Sable Island, Nova Scotia have been the subjects of a long-term research project by the Whitehead Lab at Dalhousie University. Significantly, this project has provided some of the most detailed information available on the ecology, population status, social structure and habitat use of any beaked whale population. Up until the late 1960's the Gully population of northern bottlenose was the target of exploitation by the commercial whaling industry and their numbers were severely depleted. From photo-identification studies their population of 130 individuals appears stable, however due to the risks of anthropogenic activities, northern bottlenose residing in the Gully are listed as "Endangered" by Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. This presentation will describe the survey and data collection efforts for the long term monitoring study of northern bottlenose whales in the Gully, some recent findings, and plans for future work.