

Teaching Whales to Sing New Songs

Do you like to sing? What is your favourite song? Where did you learn your favourites? Did someone teach it to you?

This story is about whales. Do you know what whales are? A whale is not a fish. A whale is a very big animal that lives in the sea. This one is a humpback whale, and this story is about humpback whales.

Did you know that male humpback whales sing? They sing a strange sort of song – you might not even know that it was singing because it wasn't like the songs you sing in Sabbath school.

Every year humpback whales swim from Antarctica, where it is very very cold, up the coast of Australia to where the water is warm. Then they all swim back again! Every year they swim north and they swim south. As they travel, all the Mr. Humpback whales sing a song. It lasts about ten minutes and it has about seven themes or 'verses' and it is very loud. It is broadcast at about 170 decibels, the same amount of noise as a cruising container ship. On a good day another whale can hear it for up to 30 kilometres! Nobody really knows why Mr. Humpback Whales sing, but the scientists think it is to tell all the lady Humpback Whales that he is around and looking for a wife.

Scientists have been recording these whale songs. They found out that the song of the whales that swim up the west coast of Australia was different to the song of the whales that swim up the east coast, past Sydney. They were very different songs and even the scientists who listened to the recordings could easily tell the difference.

In 1995 and 1996 the scientists were very surprised to hear that the song two whales on the east coast were singing was very similar to the song the whales on the west coast sang. They decided that these whales must have swum east instead of west, but they still sang the same song. All the other 80 whales they recorded still sang the east coast song.

The next year, the songs of 112 whales were recorded. The west coast song was much more popular. Most of the whales sang either one song or the other, but three of them sang verses from both songs. By the end of the 1997 southward migration, almost all the whales sang the new song. In 1998, all the whales were singing the new song.

Nobody knows why the whales changed their song. Maybe they were sick of singing the same song. Maybe the lady whales liked the new song better and paid more attention to those who were singing the new song.

Hearing about how just two whales taught all the other whales a new song, made me think that we should be teaching other people our 'special song'. Jesus wants us to tell other people that He loves us and that He will take us to live with Him one day soon. We teach other people about Jesus when we are gentle when we play with a baby or a pet animal. We teach other people about Jesus when we share our toys and books. We teach them when we are obedient to Mum and Dad, and when we are quiet and reverent in church. We teach them when we are happy and good. We teach them when we talk about how Jesus loves us.

Wouldn't it be good if we could be like those two whales and teach everybody around us about Jesus by being kind and gentle and helpful and obedient?



You will be able to find a lot of information about whales on the internet. This photograph was taken by Ross Isaacs and shows a humpback whale breaching in Antarctica.

