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Squid invasion hitting Oregon coast and scientists are concerned, but could there be a silver lining?

By **Lori Tobias, The Oregonian**
April 09, 2010, 7:40PM



View full size Al Pazar

Fisherman Mike Sicklich, who lives in the Newport area, hauls a Humboldt squid on to the deck of Al Pazar's fishing boat off the Oregon coast. Pazar said the animals can be "creepy."

NEWPORT -- Last year when fish surveyors went out to count whiting -- Oregon's largest fishery by volume -- they found plenty to count all right, but it wasn't what they expected.

Instead, they found themselves looking at so many Humboldt squid, they couldn't see the whiting -- also known as hake -- to get an accurate count, said Selina Heppell, an associate professor in fisheries at Oregon State University.

"People are really worried about this," Heppell said. "Because we have evidence of squid having a negative impact on whiting in Chile, the concern is that they could be affecting whiting here."

Humboldt squid typically were found in Southern California, Mexico and the waters off Chile and Peru, but in recent years the jumbo squid have been found in increasingly large numbers in northern waters off California, Oregon and Washington - even Alaska.

Now researchers and fisherman are



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pondering a number of questions about the predator squid: Why are they here? What will it mean to traditional fisheries such as whiting and salmon? Will they stick around?

And there's another possibility: Could the jumbo squid spawn a new fishery in Oregon and beyond?

And there's another possibility: Could the jumbo squid spawn a new fishery in Oregon and beyond?

People first reported seeing squid north of their native waters in the late 1990s after the El Niño occurred in about 1998, Heppell said. After last year's numbers proved so dramatic, Heppell and researchers in California and the Pacific Northwest decided the time had come to learn more. Earlier this year, they received a two-year, \$120,000 grant from Sea Grant, a federal university-based program to support coastal resources, to study them.

"To me, what we really want to know is what the squid are eating at different times of the year," Heppell said. "How many are there? They move fast and over a wide range and are not easy to detect with acoustic gear. Trying to estimate how many squid there are is not an easy thing to do."

One study in the Gulf of California put the population there at 4 million in 30 square miles, according to **William Gilly, a professor of biology at Stanford University**.

"That's a lot of squid"

"If the density is anything like that off **Newport** or Astoria, that's a lot of squid in a frighteningly small area," Gilly said. He believes if the squid develop a taste for salmon smolt -- and there is evidence they have -- it could wipe out the fish for the season.

Humboldt squid can measure as long as 6 feet and weigh upward of 100 pounds. The largest spotted off Oregon have been about 5 feet long and 25 pounds, according to Heppell. Their tentacles are covered with small suckers that have spiky teeth, and they have a large triangular beak they use to tear at their prey. They are voracious eaters and will cannibalize their own.

"These squid grab whatever comes by them," Heppell said. "If what comes by is mostly squid, that's what they eat."

They also have been said to grab seabirds, and there are stories of squids killing divers.

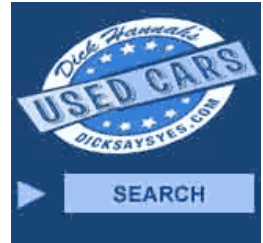
"They are creepy," said Al Pazar, who fishes out of Newport. Pazar caught 15,000 pounds of squid last year to use for crab bait. He recalled waking up on his boat one night and finding himself surrounded by tens of thousands of squid. "It is quite impressive to see these things on the surface. When they are together, it is incredible. In South America, they call them the diablo rojo, or red devil. You don't want to fall into the water with a swarm of these things."

Lucrative possibilities

But while they may not be the most attractive of sea life, they could be lucrative, Gilly said.

"In places like Astoria and Newport, there are a lot of fishermen who would

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Humboldt or Jumbo squid facts

Habitat: Live at depths of 660 to 2,300 feet and traditionally ranged from Tierra del Fuego north to California. More recently, they have been appearing further north.

Size: Up to 6 feet and 100 pounds. Skin varies from deep purplish-red to white. They have two diamond-shaped fins which they use to swim and glide.

Lifespan: About one year

Prey: Lanternfish, shrimp, mollusks, and other cephalopods. Also known to cannibalize other squid.

Behavior: Notoriously aggressive. Hunt in schools containing as many as 1,200 individuals, and swim at speeds from three to 15 mph. Can eject themselves from the water and glide through the air to escape predators.

Reproduction: Experts know little about spawning habits, largely because the squid spend most of their lives at depths unsafe for diving. Their eggs have never been observed in nature. Like most cephalopods, Humboldt squid reproduce only once in their lifetime.

Source: Smithsonian

like to go fishing, developing a new product. There could be a big future in that."

Squid already is considered by some to be among the best crab bait, and calamari steaks -- imported from Mexico and elsewhere -- can be found in most seafood shops. Gilly thinks the squid also could be used for aquaculture food, as protein or for pharmaceuticals.

"I have seen in Japan squid flour, and there is a company in Norway making a type of fish-oil product from squid," Gilly said.

The **Seafood Consumer Center in Astoria** has begun researching the idea, director Heather Mann said.

"We are in the process of starting to think about whether or not there might be some opportunities," Mann said. "We're looking at what research would need to take place to develop the Humboldt squid. We do know there is some labor-intensive work in harvesting Humboldt squid because of their size and also in preparing them for food."

And there is another problem -- no one seems to know how long the squid will stick around.

"The squid have come and gone and come and gone again in Peru," Heppell said. "You don't want to start a fishery if they are not going to be here."

-- **Lori Tobias**

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Posted by **jory**
April 09, 2010, 6:03PM

Kill Kill Kill. Kill because they are "creepy". Kill for \$. Kill because they eat fish. Kill because they eat their own. Kill Kill Kill.

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Posted by **Rick**
April 10, 2010, 1:50AM

I, for one, welcome our new giant squid overlords....

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Posted by **nealjpage**
April 10, 2010, 10:11AM

He shoots! He scores!

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Posted by **fopo_pdx**
April 11, 2010, 12:26AM

"I, for one, welcome our new giant squid overlords...."

It's rare that a comment thread hits it apex on the second post, but this one did.

Rick FTW.

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Posted by **narl**
April 10, 2010, 6:36AM

Kill because they're delicious.

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Posted by **lalalalalalalalalalal**
April 10, 2010, 12:09PM

Drop Portland Police officer Kyle Nice into an ocean-full of squid and let him pull his weapon on them with his tough-guy act.

Jail Kyle Nice.

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Posted by **olive09**
April 09, 2010, 6:15PM

"People are really worried about this," said Heppell. "Because we have

evidence of squid having a negative impact on whiting in Chile, the concern is that they could be effecting whiting here."

I am very confused. First we are told that Dr. Heppel is concerned the squid are, in essence, bringing about the whiting populations. Then the the reporter claims that others are concerned about detrimental effects on the whiting population.

You know what I think? The poor education in Oregon has negatively AFFECTED writing and editorial skills and has EFFECTED poor grammar.

As for Dr. Heppel, I'm going to give her the benefit of the doubt. I suspect she said that the squid might be affecting whiting, not effecting. Of course, the effect of that affecting could be negative or positive.....and I also suspect most of the readers here are going "huh?" Just go back to grammar lessons and learn the differences between effect and affect. Until you have that down solid, please don't use effect as a verb.

As for the squid, I'm all for developing a market! I love calamari, so I'll be watching for it in my local Freddy's.

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Posted by **coachtk9**
April 09, 2010, 6:51PM

i think it was very clear. just read it as it is, and put it into context. effect and affect ARE different, but when we have an entire report, its really easy to put it into context. its like there, their, and theyre. there is a difference but its still easy to understand if you have that education you were talking about... unless you are an english professor, it just makes you sound stuck up and egotistical

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Posted by **Flem_Snopes**
April 09, 2010, 8:03PM

Thank you, Olive09! Nice work. (I got tired of referring to Strunk and White so I hung the distinction on the wall).

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Posted by **hokieduck**
April 10, 2010, 8:38AM

@ Olive: "...until you have that down solid..." Uh, that would be solidly, Ms. Grammar. Until you know the difference between an adverb and an adjective, you might want to avoid publicly chastising others for what was quite likely a typo.

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Posted by **bitchncamaro**
April 09, 2010, 6:25PM

jory,
Please remember to take your medication. Please, really. Don't forget.

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Posted by **wayfarer1008**
April 09, 2010, 7:18PM

It will be interesting to see if they stick around
After years of overfishing this may be a sign that the coastal environment is finally improving.

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Posted by **shaniko**
April 09, 2010, 7:38PM

Oh? When did you or anyone else declare "that the coastal environment" was overfished or otherwise compromised? I don't think you know what you are talking about.

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Posted by **Flem_Snopes**
April 09, 2010, 7:56PM

That's hilarious. You don't think the coast has been overfished? Are you aware that the natives could practically walk across the Columbia during the big salmon runs in the spring and fall? Have you read anything about the history of the salmon runs? Blame some of the depletion on the dams, but the vast amount of damage came from over-fishing.

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Posted by **shaniko**
April 09, 2010, 9:33PM

Nope, it hasn't been "overfished"-- They didn't fish it out even when there was pressure-so how can it be, after nearly 25 years of basically a token fishery that all of sudden somebody starts howling "overfishing!! overfishing"? It just defies logic.

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Posted by **2fly4pdx**
April 09, 2010, 7:37PM

mmm...calamari....mmm

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Posted by **Flem_Snopos**
April 09, 2010, 7:50PM

Hey, a new resource has shown up! Who needs salmon or the lessons that should have been learned! Let's plunder the cr@p out of it!

Say what you want, but humans have a terrible track record. They (fine, we) don't give a damn about the plight of the next generation, not to mention the animals. It's not always Maslow's hierarchy of need -- it's human's hierarchy of greed (greedy, greedier, greediest). I've seen fishermen in Astoria -- always trying to pluck more crabs than allowed, always trying to steal more clams than their limit, always trying to snag an extra fish (and no, not to put food on the table, but just to get all they can). Somehow, the rules don't seem to apply to them.

But the follow-up is that being indignant is like shouting in the wind. Greed is human nature. Why be upset? Why not realize that nothing will change until the planet is stripped of plants and animals and, thanks to the innovations of science, eating our own excrement and drinking our p!ss. That's the future. Look around you. For every self-less creature, there's 1,000 greedy primates surveying their surroundings for plunder.

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Posted by **shaniko**
April 09, 2010, 9:52PM

..." I've seen fishermen in Astoria -- always trying to pluck more crabs than allowed, always trying to steal more clams than their limit, always trying to snag an extra fish (and no, not to put food on the table, but just to get all they can)."

Yeah, wherever they go, Portland "sportsmen" always make a good impression.

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Posted by **dooglas**
April 09, 2010, 7:52PM

The natural environment is in a constant state of flux. If squid numbers are up, and whiting numbers are down - that just may be the way the wind is blowing. It is unrealistic of us humans to think that we can make the world remain frozen in some steady state that we happen to like or are at least used to having around.

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Posted by **ORYGUN84**
April 09, 2010, 8:06PM

Fresh Oregon Coast Calamari...sounds nice.....let nature take its course

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