

# Kid's KOrner

## Not All Whale Watching Expeditions End In Success

OCEAN CITY, Md. — Scanning the bare Atlantic horizon from the bridge of Mariner, his 65-foot sport-fishing boat, Darrell Nottingham sighs, "I've seen 'em so thick you couldn't count 'em."

He and the other 52 people aboard are looking for whales, peering across the choppy ocean with binoculars and bare eyes for the trademark spout of a fin whale, second-largest variety of the world's largest creatures and an important citizen of global waters.

To no avail. After more than 10 windy, chilly hours at sea, Nottingham and his disappointed passengers return to Ocean City's Talbot Street pier. Whatever whales dwell in those waters have kept their whereabouts a secret.

### Bad Day

Earlier in the day, as the Mariner tosses and pitches 40 miles east of Ocean City, one of the two naturalists aboard, Hal Wierenga, can only shake his head. "Today the chances are way down," he says. "This is not an optimum trip." Wierenga estimates that he's been out 88 times, and most of those times he's seen whales.

As the boat nears home, the sea calms, color returns to the faces of the few seasick passengers, and the other naturalist, Wayne Klockner, waxes philosophical. "Probably within 100 miles of us, north and south, there are hundreds of whales," he says. "But for some reason, the route they're traveling doesn't coincide with ours."

Despite the probable discomfort and the possibility of seeing no whales, nature enthusiasts in the mid-Atlantic region have been signing up for the whale-watching trips for the past 15 years.

They usually have to work to find

them. Although whales are a common sight off the U.S. Pacific coast and farther north in the Atlantic, they're less common in the mid-Atlantic, because they like deep water, and the continental shelf doesn't drop off until it's nearly 60 miles out from the Maryland shore.

"Human beings have a tremendous affinity for these mammals of the sea," says Ron Naveen of Cooksville, Md., organizer of the trips. "There's something about our culture that has bred a lot of excitement about whales."

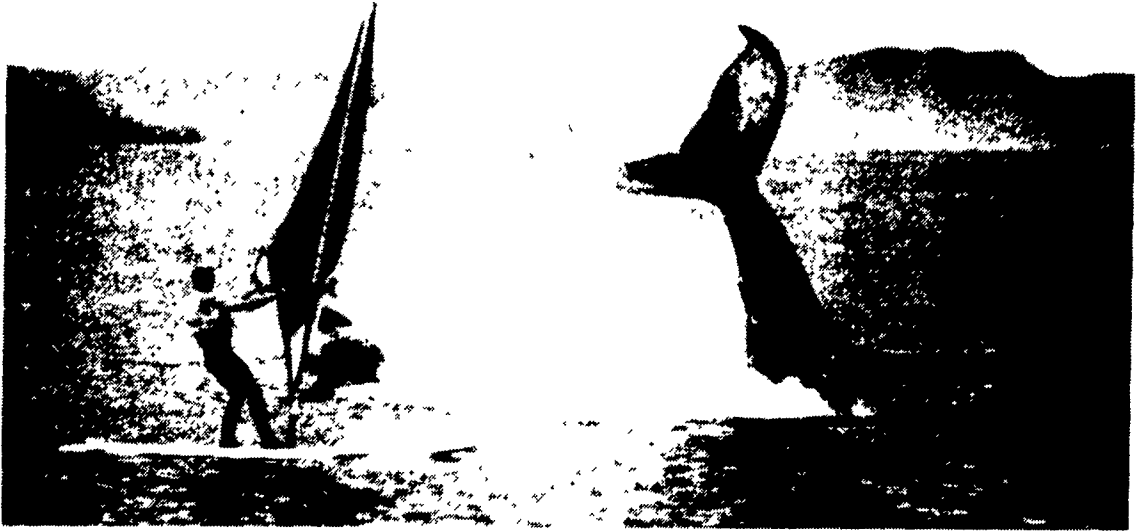
When one of the monsters is sighted — the fin whales are as long as the Mariner and sometimes surface quite close to it — the passengers shout excitedly and jump up and down, says Naveen, an ebullient, 40-year-old bachelor who gave up a successful career as a lawyer five years ago to pursue his interest in nature. "It's a visceral, emotional type of reaction."

### Rewarded With Sightings

Most of the trips are more productive than this one. Naveen recalls voyages on which the whale-watchers were rewarded with sightings not only of fin whales, but of sperm, Minke, and killer whales.

Captain Nottingham produces photographs of a fin whale that "got right under the bow. I turned off the engines because I was afraid I'd run right up on his back."

Mariner is the only boat at the dock that's regularly chartered for whale-watching and bird-watching trips. Nottingham, a taciturn but good-natured man who has spent 36 of his 49 years on the water, puts up with substantial ribbing from his fellow sport-fishing skippers.



A sailboarding visitor looking for whales is rewarded with a close encounter with two humpbacks in Newfoundland's Bonavista Bay. Fortunately, the curiosity of the whales was satisfied in one pass and they swam off unimpressed. All whales are protected by Canadian law. Newfoundland's Atlantic coast is known as "iceberg alley", the Labrador Current sweeping icebergs southward from Greenland and the Canadian arctic.

A decade ago, Naveen says, "It was considered a bit wimpish, to say the least, to have these people take us off shore."

Nottingham, who Naveen says has "the best eyes in the world," might dispute that assessment today. He's developed his own expertise in sea birds as well as whales.

And he's learned to like the nature-lovers. Sitting before Mariner's electronic controls on

the swaying bridge, he says, "These people are a lot more hardy than fishermen. If these were fishermen, half of 'em would be sick by now."

Nottingham and Lynn Jarmon, his youthful mate on Mariner, have been on the boat since 6 a.m. Often their trips with the naturalists last 12 or 15 hours. Rough waters shorten this one by keeping them from going beyond the continental shelf.

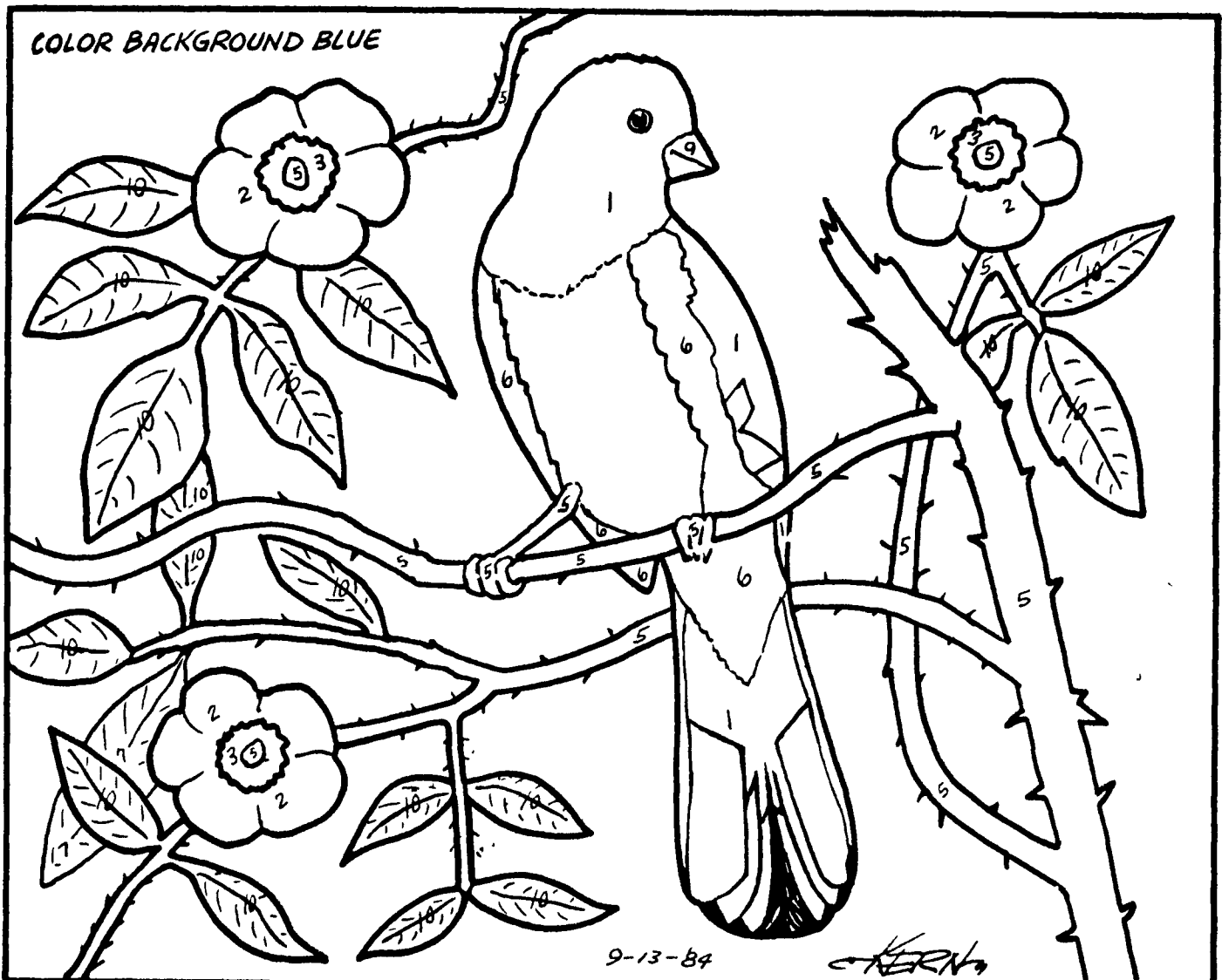
"Fishing's getting terrible," Nottingham says. "I enjoy this. But it's such a long day, you couldn't do it all the time."

"It's kind of like being a detective out there, trying to solve a mystery," Naveen says of the whales, intelligent creatures who seem reluctant to share their secrets with humans. "We really don't have the faintest idea where these whales come from or where they're going."

## COLOR THIS!

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|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK  | 6. ORANGE     |
| 2. PINK   | 7. GREEN      |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN  |
| 4. BLUE   | 9. LT. BLUE   |
| 5. BROWN  | 10. LT. GREEN |

**RUFUS-SIDED TOWHEE.** THE TOWHEE BIRD IS IDENTIFIED BY ITS "CHEWINK" SONG AND ITS BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE. THEIR EYES ARE BRIGHT RED EXCEPT IN THE SOUTHEAST WHERE THEY BECOME WHITE. ALL TOWHEE BIRDS ARE GROUND BIRDS. THEY ARE OFTEN SEEN SCRATCHING VIGOROUSLY FOR INSECTS IN DEAD LEAVES, AND TURNED OVER SOIL.



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