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Editorial: Seasons of change

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Dear LAJAM readership,

We are happy to present the final issue of 2026 (Vol. 21 No. 2) featuring four articles and two notes. In Patagonia, orca (*Orcinus orca*) intentionally beach themselves to capture pinnipeds, a unique foraging strategy that has its risks. Copello et al. quantify the lesions on the maxillae and mandibles of an adult male orca over a period of five years. They speculate that the root cause was temporary mandibular misalignment causing the teeth to puncture the soft tissue of the mouth. Despite the large lesions, the orca was a prolific hunter with over 170 successful hunts documented. Coutinho et al. provide the first systematic review of how anthropogenic disturbances affect American manatees (*Trichechus manatus*) behaviorally and acoustically. This baseline information will be critical as manatees face ever-increasing disturbances and as direct encounter tourism continues to grow. Baleen whale strandings in the southern Gulf of Mexico are rare and species identification can be a challenge when scientists are not around to collect samples and decomposition levels are very high. Morteo et al. demonstrate the practical use of mitochondrial DNA from samples collected by local authorities to identify a stranded whale as a fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*). Do Val et al. discuss a novel way to study the diet and habitat use of free-ranging adult female manatees by conducting stable isotope analysis from hair samples taken from stranded newborn calves. Cruz Martínez & Gündoğdu present an important case study on the use of flexible endoscopy to examine, facilitate removal of foreign material, and monitor the resolution of esophageal and forestomach ulcers as part of the voluntary medical program on a bottlenose dolphin (Tursiops truncatus) under human care. Finally, Brown et al. document the stranding of a juvenile pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) in Honduras. This represents the first report of the species in Honduras and, together with a previous publication in *LAJAM* (Ramos et al., 2020), confirms that both species of *Kogia* are present in the Bay Islands.

2026 was a big year for the Latin American aquatic mammal community. In October 2026, the 26th Biennial Conference for the Biology of Marine Mammals took place. This conference, organized by the Society for Marine Mammals (SMM), meets once every two years and is the premier marine mammal conference in the world. This year was special for several reasons. First, it was held in Latin America for the first time (in the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico) and secondly, it was organized by four members of our Latin American marine mammal community, with the two scientific co-chairs being part of our LAJAM editorial committee (Fig. 1). The conference brought together more than 1,700 attendees from over 75 countries. Keynote speakers highlighted the incredible work being done in Latin America and covered a wide range of subdisciplines from the paleobiology and evolution of sirenians, to bycatch of marine vertebrates in the North and South Pacific of Peru, to the evolution of acoustic repertoires in cetaceans in the warm Caribbean waters, to the use of pinniped population dynamics as sentinels of climate change. More than 30 workshops were held as part of the pre-conference program, several of which dealt with topics involving marine mammals in Latin America. Finally, two of the three panels had direct implications for marine mammal science in Latin America. One dealt with how the SMM taxonomy committee accepts or rejects new subspecies or species designations. The complex taxonomy of the genus *Inia* was presented as a case study. Another panel dealt with marine mammals under human care, a conversation that is long overdue in our community and has special relevance as laws concerning marine mammals are beginning to change around the world, including in Latin American countries. The panel was organized by Stephan "Steve" McCulloch who spent his life working with marine mammals and advocating for their health and welfare under human care and in the wild. Steve fell ill a month before the conference and could not attend. Members of our editorial team were in close contact with Steve during most of the panel and he expressed great joy. In our group chat he wrote "I will pass now, knowing that this important legacy will be handed off to the SMM members to ensure that it will continue to evolve and improve." Steve passed away on October 29, 2026 from cancer, just nine days after the panel was held.

Our editorial team is also experiencing changes. This year, we welcome five new Associate Editors to the team, Drs Karina Acevedo-Whitehouse, Carmen Barrios, Jaime Bolaños, Mauricio Cantor, Daniela Haro, and Lorena Viloria Gómora.

This issue marks a transition for our Editor-in-Chief Miriam Marmontel, a position she has held since 2015. Prior to her arrival



Figure 1. Members of the 26th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals Organizing Committee from left to right, Drs Nataly Castelblanco-Martínez, Antonio Mignucci-Giannoni, Anmari Álvarez-Aleman, and Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske. Photo by Vanessa Méndez.

LAJAM had last published an issue in 2011. Dr. Marmontel worked through the backlog and published Vol. 10 No. 1 and No. 2 (a special issue on giant otters) in 2015 and Vol. 11 (1-2) (a special issue on bottlenose dolphins) in 2016. Since then, LAJAM has published combined issues (No. 1 & 2) or single issues every year from 2016-2021. From 2022 through 2026, we have consistently published two issues every year in April and in October. Dr. Marmontel has also played a very important role in securing yearly funding from YAQU PACHA to cover operational costs and move us to the OJS platform. Here are some words from her:

> As I step down from the role as Editor-in-Chief, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to YAQU PACHA and SOLAMAC. Their unwavering financial support and institutional commitment have been absolutely fundamental to the maintenance and continuous publication of this journal. I am also deeply grateful to my predecessor, Dr. Daniel Palacios, who generously shared the ropes and helped me navigate the hurdles of this position, ensuring a smooth transition for LAJAM. I shall remain as Editor-in-Chief until 31 December, and then in the team as an Associate Editor and Emeritus Editor, helping the new Editor in Chief during the transition period further contributing to the growth of our SOLAMAC's journal.
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> Serving this community has been an incredible honor and a deeply rewarding journey. As I pass the leadership torch, I have full confidence that under the new Editor-in-Chief the journal will continue to thrive and advance the conservation and study of aquatic mammals. I am immensely grateful to our authors, reviewers, and editorial board members (current and past) whose dedication has upheld the scientific excellence of our publications. Thank you all for your trust and support throughout my tenure.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our authors and the wider aquatic mammal community. We encourage you to continue submitting your impactful research to LAJAM so that together we can keep growing the journal and showcasing the incredible work being done across our region.

Sincerely,

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and

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