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## Sloughed skin: a method for the systematic collection of tissue samples from Baja California blue whales

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The frequency of occurrence of naturally sloughed skin was investigated to verify the feasibility of this method to study blue whale genetics off Baja California. Sloughed skin was recorded in 97% of 337 surfacing intervals with blue whales, *Balaenoptera musculus*, along the Baja California peninsula, Mexico. No significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was found in size of pieces of skin sloughed from whales in different habitats, sea surface temperatures or whether they were alone or in pairs. Samples were recoverable independent of gender and age and could be linked to individuals. While yield of extracted DNA was low (0-0.15 µg/mg tissue), gender determination was successful in 55% of the samples assayed.

Palabras clave: Sampling strategy, genetics. blue whales

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