



Whales feed near the shore of Moss Landing State Beach in this photograph taken from the deck of Monterey Bay Whale Watch's Sea Wolf II. A large pod has been lingering near the mouth of Moss Landing Harbor all week, feeding on anchovies and drawing onlookers from across the region. (Jodi Frediani --)

By

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MOSS LANDING >> It's one thing to see humpback whales feeding and frolicking just offshore. It's quite another when they're so close you can smell their breath.

That's what's happening in Moss Landing this week, as a pod of about 15 of the once-endangered creatures have settled in for an anchovy feast within a quarter-mile of shore. One of the majestic whales was even photographed venturing into the mouth of the Moss Landing Harbor.

"We were with a whale that's feeding within about 20 feet of water, it's just amazing," said marine biologist Dorris Welch, co-owner of Moss Landing-based Sanctuary Cruises. "The density and swarm of anchovies has increased so close to shore, bringing the whales in really close. And with the feed so shallow the whales have to

take a mouthful at the surface."

The show is drawing clusters of whale-watching boats to Moss Landing, thrilling spectators seaward and landward alike. One was Roseville resident Kyle Baldwin, who is visiting the Central Coast with family and came to Moss Landing State Beach on Thursday after relatives got an eyeful the day before.

"They were here for a few hours, two or three hours, just watching them," Baldwin said. "They were close enough to see breaching and see their fins. There were just tons of them. It wasn't just one or two. It was pretty spectacular."

The show is a repeat of what happened in Santa Cruz in 2012 and Capitola last year, when large numbers of whales in search of food came very close to shore. All three events drew kayakers and paddleboarders, though the Marine Mammal Protection Act requires anyone viewing whales to keep their distance.

Still on the rebound from past whaling, humpbacks feed using their baleen to filter small fish and krill from the water. That also leads to some rather poor whale breath, and onlookers near Moss Landing reported the whales were close enough to get a whiff.

Thursday, the fog obscured some of the show, beginning to disperse before thickening again and drawing a curtain between the shore and the whales. But in past year, the feeding events have persisted for several weeks.

The show even drew gawkers from the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, which overlooks the ocean in Moss Landing. And patrons at Phil's Fish Market also something not usually on the menu, both in person and via the Moss Landing institution's webcam.

"We've had quite a show for the last two days," said restaurant owner Phil DiGirolamo. "Not only are the whales there, but the bird action is incredible because they're bringing the feed up to the surface."

DiGirolamo said the show is a once-every-five-years phenomenon, maybe. Patrons were loving the show, crowding a rear patio that abuts the beach.

DiGirolamo said he was also getting emails from around the globe from people who saw the show online.

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