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San Francisco Bay is popular with whales

Ther she blows: Remember Humphrey the humpback whale, whose much-heralded visits to San Francisco Bay in 1985 and 1990 made him a media sensation? Well, now researchers are beginning to realize that whales in the Bay are not quite as rare an occurrence as they used to be.

The Oceanic Society will launch a special research study tomorrow to probe what appears to be a large increase in the number of gray whales visiting the Bay during their seasonal migrations between Alaska and Baja California. According to the institute, whales traditionally have wandered into the Bay only once in a blue moon. But during the past 12 months alone, nu-

Groups of up to four whales also have been encountered usually with one whale from the group foraging for food. Photo identification, electronic tracking, and analysis of prey will be used to help scientists learn more about this unusual whale activity.

Down with dams: If whales are going to return to the Bay, maybe steelhead will, someday return to Alameda Creek. Two dams in the Niles Canyon section of the creek between Fremont and Pleasanton are to be either removed or modified to help restore the historic steelhead runs, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission has decided.

The East Bay Regional Park District also is getting involved that agency plans to remove two small swim dams from a portion of the creek that runs through Sunol Regional Wilderness. Final details and funding are worked out. There is no timetable for these projects, but environmentalists are ecstatic nonetheless. The Alameda Creek Alliance suggests reconstrating the two SFPUC dams elsewhere "as a monument to human folly and shortsightedness."

Green acres: Since gardening season is in full swing with the arrival of spring, here are some facts to consider if you still have one of those big, green,

water-guzzling lawns instead of more environmentally friendly landscaping: Combustion engine-powered lawn and garden equipment generates an estimated 9 tons of pollution every day in the Bay Area; a typical two-stroke motor creates as much pollution in an hour as a car driving for 50 miles; nationwide, an estimated 17-million gallons of fuel is spilled annually while filling up gas-powered lawn and garden equipment.

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merous gray whale sightings have been made from Pier 7 in San Francisco as far northeast as San Pablo Bay.

The new research will help scientists put a finger on just why the Bay has become so popular lately with whales.

Little known: To date, researchers don't know much about whale activity in the Bay. Initial observations, however, show that individual whales have been seen lurking in specific areas for several days.