False killer whales are highly social, known for cooperative hunting and maintaining strong, long-term bonds. An endangered main Hawaiian Islands insular population includes three recognized social clusters: C1, C2, C3. Although they appear longitudinally stable, all three clusters are interconnected and some individuals are regularly associated with multiple clusters, making their social affiliation unclear.

Why is this important?

- Culturally-mediated behaviors such as prey-sharing and a tendency to mass strand make false killer whales vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts. Previous studies indicate social clusters in Hawai’i play an important role in where individuals spend their time and how frequently they interact with fisheries, which can be used to help mitigate harmful and sometimes fatal interactions.
- Socially ambiguous individuals may have a strong impact on the health of the population by disseminating information between clusters or acting as a vector for diseases. These individuals may provide valuable lines of communication among clusters and help minimize inbreeding, although additional encounters may be required to elucidate their cluster affiliation.

For more information and a complete list of publications see: http://www.cascadiaresearch.org/projects/hawaii

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