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Hvaldimir: Russian Beluga Spy Whale

John Granicke (Mentor: Rob Wilson, Ph.D.)



Introduction

- April 26, 2019, a beluga whale was found off the coast of Norway
- The whale was found wearing a harness with mounts for cameras
- The clips on the harness read "Equipment St. Petersburg"
- The whale was named Hvaldimir, a combination the Norwegian word for whale, and Vladimir

Methodology

- Nevelt, "Hvaldimir: Seeking sanctuary for a whale dubbed a Russian spy,"
- Janjevic, "Russian 'spy whale' may have been therapist,"
- Ritchie, "Locals seeing progress in effort to save an overly friendly whale in Norway,"



Satellite image of whale pens near Russian naval base



Hvaldimir, in harness, with local fisherman

Findings

- Hvaldimir could be a Russian spy whale:
 - Hvaldimir is good with people and preforms tricks on command
 - Hvaldimir was found 250 miles away from Murmansk, which has multiple military bases near by
 - Russia has a history of using marine animals for military purposes
- Hvaldimir could be a Russian therapy whale:
 - A 2008 video shows a beluga whale, named Semyom, playing with children at a Russian water sports facility
 - The harness would have been used to tow a boat full of children

Conclusion

- Nobody has claimed ownership of Hvaldimir yet
- Hvaldimir is probably not a therapy whale, as Semyon has scars from a sea lion attack that are not present on Hvaldimir
- Hvaldimir most likely escaped from Russian naval base, where he did tasks such as guarding ports and searching for mines
- Hvaldimir is currently free-roaming in Norway, and a sanctuary is planned to be built for him in the future



Norwegian news station interviews *Semyon*, therapy whale (2008)