

# KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ART PROJECT  
COMMEMORATING A WHALE STRANDING IN THE  
OUTER HEBRIDES

12 JULY 2025  
TRAIGH MHÒR BEACH, NORTH TOLSTA  
ISLE OF LEWIS

NORTH HARRIS STUDIO,  
ISLE OF HARRIS

PHOTO: LIFE-SIZE MOULD BY SAM GARE WITH SEA RIBBONS



# ARTISTS

VISUAL ARTIST  
SAM GARE

MUSICIANS  
ALEX SOUTH - COMPOSER, CLARINET  
NEREA BELLO - VOICE  
KATHERINE WREN - VIOLA

AUDIO  
AOIFE GLASS

CHOREOGRAPHER  
AYA KOBAYASHI

PHOTOGRAPHY  
CREDIT: PHIL HALL

(1)

PHOTO: LIVING MEMORIAL



(1) OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW OF THE  
ARTWORK

(2) SAND WHALES

VISUAL ARTIST  
SAM GARE

(3) MUSIC

MUSICIANS  
ALEX SOUTH  
NEREA BELLO  
KATHERINE WREN

(4) MOVEMENT

CHOREOGRAPHER  
AYA KOBAYASHI L

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# OVERVIEW

KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING WAS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ART PROJECT COMMEMORATING THE MASS STRANDING OF 55 LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALES IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES ON 16 JULY 2023. IT BECAME A COLLECTIVE ACT OF REMEMBRANCE, A LIVING MEMORIAL SHAPED THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ARTISTIC COLLABORATION.

THE PROJECT WOVE TOGETHER COMMUNITY-MADE WHALE SAND SCULPTURES AND MUSIC INSPIRED BY WHALE VOCALISATIONS AND TRADITIONAL GAELIC SONG. AS THE TIDE SLOWLY RECLAIMED THE SCULPTURES, RETURNING THE WHALES HOME, IT BECAME BOTH A MEMORIAL AND A REMINDER OF OUR ENDURING BOND WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

DEVELOPED OVER SEVERAL YEARS, AND IN ITS FINAL MONTHS THROUGH WORKSHOPS WITH LOCAL CHILDREN AND ADULTS, THE PROJECT BROUGHT TOGETHER SCIENCE, ART, MUSIC, AND COMMUNITY. ALONGSIDE THE PUBLIC WORK, IT ALSO GATHERED VOICES AND WORDS FROM THE COMMUNITY, PRESERVING THEIR REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

(1)



PHOTO: LIVING MEMORIAL



# CREATIVE TEAM



**SAM GARE**  
VISUAL ARTIST

SAM IS AN ARTIST BASED BETWEEN LONDON AND THE ISLE OF HARRIS. HER PRACTICE BRIDGES NATURE, CULTURE, AND SCIENCE, COMBINING FIELDWORK AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION TO FOSTER ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT. A CO-FOUNDER OF THE WILDERNESS ART COLLECTIVE, SHE COLLABORATES WIDELY TO INSPIRE DEEPER CONNECTIONS WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.



**ALEX SOUTH**  
MUSICIAN

BASED IN GLASGOW, ALEX IS A POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, RESEARCHING ETHICAL ISSUES AROUND HUMAN USES OF ANIMAL SOUND. HIS INTERDISCIPLINARY PHD COMBINED ECOMUSICOLOGY, ZOOMUSICOLOGY, AND BIOACOUSTICS. A CLARINETTIST, COMPOSER, AND EDUCATOR, HE PERFORMS WITH LEADING ENSEMBLES AND PUBLISHES WIDELY ON ANIMAL CULTURE AND BIOMUSICOLOGY.



**NEREA BELLO**  
SINGER

NEREA BELLO IS A BASQUE SINGER, PERFORMER, AND JEWELLERY MAKER BASED IN SCOTLAND. MOVING BETWEEN SOLO, COLLABORATIVE, AND THEATRE WORK, SHE EXPLORES FORGOTTEN SOUNDS AND RAW VOICES THAT EXPRESS VULNERABILITY. HER JEWELLERY PRACTICE MIRRORS THIS APPROACH, REVIVING DISCARDED MATERIALS. COLLABORATION REMAINS CENTRAL TO HER ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE PROCESS.



**KATHERINE WREN**  
MUSICIAN

KATHERINE WREN, FOUNDER OF NORDIC VIOLA, EXPLORES MUSIC OF THE FAR NORTH THROUGH PERFORMANCE, IMPROVISATION, AND COLLABORATION WITH COMPOSERS ACROSS SCOTLAND, ICELAND, GREENLAND, AND BEYOND. HER PROJECTS ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE, WEAVING TRADITIONAL MELODIES, CONTEMPORARY WORKS, AND COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS. SHE HIGHLIGHTS CLIMATE IMPACTS ON NORTHERN HABITATS, FOSTERING DIALOGUE THROUGH MUSIC.



**AYA KOBAYASHI**  
CHOREOGRAPHER

AYA IS A GLASGOW-BASED DANCE ARTIST, CHOREOGRAPHER, AND LECTURER AT THE ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF SCOTLAND. TRAINED IN JAPAN AND THE UK, SHE HAS PERFORMED WITH LEADING COMPANIES, CO-CREATES WITH COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOURS, AND SPECIALISES IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICE. HER WORK SPANS TEACHING, MOVEMENT DIRECTION, IMPROVISATION, AND SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCES INTERNATIONALLY.



**AOIFE GLASS**  
PODCASTER

AOIFE GLASS IS A SCIENCE COMMUNICATOR, STORYTELLER, AND PODCAST PRODUCER. SHE CREATES ENGAGING CONTENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC TOPICS, COLLABORATING WITH INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM. PRODUCER OF KEENING: VOICES OF THE STRANDING, AOIFE BLENDS PERSONAL STORIES WITH RESEARCH TO INSPIRE DIALOGUE, AWARENESS, AND ACTION ON PRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.



# ACTIVITIES

## WHALE SCULPTING WORKSHOP

HANDS-ON WORKSHOP TO CAST LIFE-SIZE SAND WHALES AHEAD OF THE EVENT. OPPORTUNITIY TO MEET THE ARTISTS.

## THE STRANDING GROUND

VISUAL DATA INSTALLATION MARKING WHERE WHALES STRANDED, SHARING THEIR STORIES. - ART AND SCIENCE COMMUNICATION.

## WHALE BY WHALE

DROP IN SESSION TO CREATE 53 SMALL SAND WHALES, USING SMALL WOODEN MOULDS, EACH REPRESENTING A LIFE LOST.

## LIVING MEMORIAL - MAIN EVENT

PROCESSION, LIVE MUSIC, AND THE COMMUNITY SCULPTING OF THE FINAL TWO LARGE SAND WHALES. PUBLIC COULD WATCH OR TAKE PART.

## WITNESS

WATCH THE SEA RECLAIM THE WHALES WITH A LIVE MUSIC PERFORMANCE AND CHANCE TO SAY WORDS, SING, PLAY ETC

## REFLECT - MUSIC AND WORD PERFORMANCE

LIVE PERFORMANCE OF THE MUSIC COMPOSED FOR KEENING, PLUS PLAYING OF THE TESTIMONIES FROM THE 2023 STRANDING.

## EXHIBITION

EXHIBITION SHARING THE STORY OF THE PROJECT, FEATURING ARTWORK, MUSIC AND RESEARCH. ALSO MEET SCIENTISTS AND MARINE LIFE RESCUERS.

(1)



# SAND WHALES

(2)

PHOTO: SMALL SAND WHALES WITH FINS





AT THE HEART OF KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING WERE THE SAND WHALES, CONCEIVED BY VISUAL ARTIST SAM GARE AS A WAY TO SYMBOLICALLY RETURN THE ANIMALS TO THE SEA. SAM WANTED THE PUBLIC TO BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THE MEMORIAL, OFFERING AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAY GOODBYE AND EXPERIENCE CLOSURE.

A TOTAL OF 55 SAND WHALES WERE CREATED, EACH REPRESENTING ONE OF THE WHALES LOST: 53 WERE SMALL, AND 2 WERE LIFE-SIZED. SAM CREATED WOODEN MOULDS FOR THE SAND SCULPTURES, BASED ON A HISTORIC MODEL FROM THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM. THE MOULDS MADE IT EASY FOR THE PUBLIC TO CREATE THE WHALES WITHOUT PRESSURE TO SCULPT PERFECTLY; PARTICIPANTS SIMPLY SMOOTHED THE FORMS AFTER CASTING, TRANSFORMING THE ACT INTO GENTLE, CARING TOUCHES. USING DIGITAL TOOLS AND TRADITIONAL CARVING, SAM CREATED A WAY TO HONOUR THE WHALES' MEMORY.

DESIGNED TO BE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AGES, THE SCULPTURES ENCOURAGED HANDS-ON PARTICIPATION, AND AS THE TIDE SLOWLY RECLAIMED THE SAND, THEY BECAME A LIVING TRIBUTE TO THE WHALES - AN EPHEMERAL MEMORIAL, RETURNED TO THE SEA.

# SAM GARE

VISUAL ARTIST

(2)

PHOTO: LIFE-SIZE MOULD WITH SEA RIBBONS AND CARRYING PLATFORM





# FROM COLLECTION TO CASTING

DIALOGUES WITH THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

(2)

SAM'S PROCESS BEGAN IN DIALOGUE WITH THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S CETACEAN COLLECTIONS. EARLY IN HER RESEARCH, CURATOR RICHARD SABIN INTRODUCED HER TO THE SERIES OF PLASTER CASTS TAKEN FROM STRANDED ANIMALS AND PRESERVED WITHIN THE MUSEUM. THIS IMMEDIATELY RESONATED WITH HER OWN INTEREST IN MOULD-MAKING, PARTICULARLY HER IDEA OF CREATING SAND WHALES FORMED IN PUBLIC SPACES. THE CONNECTION LED HER TO EXPLORE NOT ONLY THE ANIMALS REPRESENTED IN THE MODELS, BUT ALSO THE PROCESSES OF CASTING AND REPRODUCTION THEMSELVES.

SHE CARRIED OUT A 3D SCAN OF A 1930S PILOT WHALE MODEL, SHE WAS ABLE TO TRACE THE ORIGINS OF A CAST ORIGINALLY MADE BY MUSEUM MODEL MAKER PERCY STAMMWITZ. STAMMWITZ HAD CREATED THE MODEL FROM A STRANDED LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE DISCOVERED ON THE WEXFORD COAST ON JAN 28 1930.

THROUGH RESEARCH IN THE MUSEUM'S HISTORIC STRANDING CARDS AND ARCHIVES, SAM FOUND OUT THAT ADDITIONAL MODELS WITHIN THE COLLECTION WERE LINKED TO ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT STRANDINGS RECORDED IN THE UK. THESE MODELS WERE DERIVED FROM THE MASS STRANDING OF MORE THAN 130 FALSE KILLER WHALES IN THE DORNOCH FIRTH, SCOTLAND, IN OCTOBER 1927. AT THE TIME, THE SPECIES WAS POORLY UNDERSTOOD AND THOUGHT TO BE KNOWN ONLY FROM FOSSIL SPECIMENS. RECOGNISING THE SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE, MARTIN HINTON, THEN KEEPER OF ZOOLOGY, TRAVELLED TO THE SITE. WITH ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL PEOPLE, EACH ANIMAL WAS DOCUMENTED, DISSECTED, AND SKELETONS FROM 126 INDIVIDUALS WERE TRANSPORTED TO LONDON. THESE SPECIMENS NOW FORM A CORE PART OF THE MUSEUM'S CETACEAN RESEARCH COLLECTION.

INSPIRED BY THIS HISTORY, SAM BECAME INTERESTED IN HOW THE MUSEUM'S CASTING PRACTICES COULD INFORM HER OWN. WHEREAS PERCY'S PLASTER MOULDS WERE FRAGILE WORKING TOOLS, SAM DEVELOPED HARD-WEARING CARVED WOODEN MOULDS DESIGNED BOTH AS SCULPTURAL OBJECTS AND AS FUNCTIONAL FORMS. THESE MOULDS COULD WITHSTAND THE WEIGHT OF SAND AND THE INTERACTION OF THE PUBLIC, WHILE STILL HOLDING THE PRESENCE OF THE WHALE. IN DOING SO, HER WORK DRAWS DIRECT INFLUENCE FROM THE MUSEUM'S ARCHIVAL PRACTICES, CREATING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC PRESERVATION AND CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION.

PHOTO: PERCY STAMMWITZ, DOLPHIN CASTING C.1924. PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON





(2)



PHOTO: LIVING MEMORIAL



# MUSIC

ALEX SOUTH  
NEREA BELLO  
KATHERINE WREN

(3)

PHOTO: WITNESS EVENT.



# ALEX SOUTH NEREA BELLO KATHERINE WREN

(3)

THE MUSIC FOR KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING WAS CREATED BY ALEX SOUTH (CLARINET) IN COLLABORATION WITH NEREA BELLO (VOICE) AND KATHERINE WREN (VIOLA), DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM CALLS MADE BY LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALES, THE SOUNDS OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT, AND CALUM JOHNSTON'S PERFORMANCE OF THE TRADITIONAL GAELIC LAMENT PILL IÙ PILL ILL ILL ILL EÒGHAINN. THIS SONG, RECORDED IN BARRA IN 1965 AND ACCESSIBLE ONLINE THROUGH THE TOBAR AN DUALCHAIS WEBSITE, WAS REPORTEDLY USED IN FORMAL KEENING FOR THE DEAD. JOHN PURSER, IN HIS SCOTLAND'S MUSIC, SPECULATING ON THE REASONS FOR THIS, NOTED SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE VOCABLES USED IN PILL IÙ PILL ILL ILL ILL EÒGHAINN AND THE CALLS OF THE REDSHANK. PURSER LINKED THE COASTAL HABITAT OF THIS BIRD WITH THE SYMBOLIC THRESHOLD BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, MAKING ITS PRESENCE IN MOURNING MUSIC DEEPLY MEANINGFUL.

IN THIS PROJECT THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SHORELINE AS LIMINAL ZONE IS REVERSED, BECAUSE THE PILOT WHALES WHO WERE STRANDED COULD NOT SURVIVE OUT OF THE WATER. TESTIMONIES COLLECTED FROM THOSE PRESENT AT THIS EVENT DO NOT CONFIRM WHETHER OR NOT THE STRANDED PILOT WHALES WERE CALLING TO EACH OTHER, BUT BENEATH THE WAVES THEIR COMPLEX SOCIAL LIVES ARE MEDIATED THROUGH A LARGE VOCAL REPERTOIRE OF CALLS AND WHISTLES, SOMETIMES PRODUCED IN PATTERNED AND REPETITIVE SEQUENCES.<sup>1</sup> IN ADDITION, THE WHALES USE ECHOLOCATION CLICKS TO SOUND OUT THEIR SURROUNDINGS AND POSSIBLY EACH OTHER.

DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSIC, ALEX, KATHERINE, AND NEREA LISTENED TO RECORDINGS OF PILOT WHALES PROVIDED BY ELIZABETH ZWAMBORN (CAPE BRETON PILOT WHALE PROJECT) AND HEIKE VESTER (OCEAN SOUNDS). THEY EXPERIMENTED WITH ORNAMENTATION USED BY THESE MARINE MAMMALS BOTH TO GENERATE IMITATIONS OF PILOT WHALE 'CONTACT CALL' SEQUENCES, AND TO STRUCTURE SHORT MELODIC FRAGMENTS BASED ON THE HARMONIC MODE FOUND IN PILL IÙ PILL ILL ILL ILL EÒGHAINN. IN PERFORMANCE, THE THREE MUSICIANS IMPROVISE TOGETHER ON THESE MATERIALS. NEREA'S VOICE, RISING FROM ITS BASQUE SOIL AND HEAVY WITH MEMORY, IS SUPPORTED BY THE RICH AND MELANCHOLIC TONES OF VIOLA AND CLARINET, INSTRUMENTS FREQUENTLY EMPLOYED BY COMPOSERS WISHING TO EVOKE MOURNING.

1. VESTER ET AL. (2017) THE JOURNAL OF THE ACOUSTICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA 141, ZWAMBORN & WHITEHEAD (2017) BIOACOUSTICS 26, ZWAMBORN & WHITEHEAD (2017) BEHAVIOUR 154.





# MOVEMENT

# AYA KOBAYASHI

CHOREOGRAPHER

(4)

PHOTO: LIVING MEMORIAL



# LIVING MEMORIAL

THE MAIN EVENT OF KEENING: SONG OF THE STRANDING WAS A GUIDED PERFORMANCE OF MUSIC AND SAND CASTING, LED BY CHOREOGRAPHER AYA KOBAYASHI. USING SAM GARE'S LIFE-SIZE WOODEN MOULD, THE COMMUNITY CARRIED IT ON A HAND-BUILT PLATFORM TO THE REST OF THE POD, WHICH HAD BEEN CAST BY THE PUBLIC EARLIER IN THE DAY. THERE, TWO LIFE-SIZE SAND WHALES WERE CAST, CHOSEN FOR THEIR STRONGEST FAMILY CONNECTIONS.

AYA'S CHOREOGRAPHY GUIDED PARTICIPANTS THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS. HER DIRECTION OF COLLECTIVE MOVEMENT, USING BREATH, HAND GESTURES, AND GENTLE TOUCH, HELPED THE GROUP MOVE TOGETHER INTENTIONALLY WHILE ALSO ALLOWING SPONTANEOUS ACTIONS, SUCH AS HOLDING HANDS OR TOUCHING THE WHALES. EACH GESTURE BECAME AN ACT OF REMEMBRANCE, EMBODYING BOTH THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR OF THE 2023 RESCUE.

THE PLATFORM CARRYING THE MOULD, INSPIRED BY HEBRIDEAN FUNERAL BIRS AND ECHOING RESCUE PONTOONS, CREATED A SYMBOLIC SPACE CONNECTING MOURNING WITH THE EFFORT TO SAVE LIFE. MOVING THE MOULD COLLECTIVELY AND CASTING THE WHALES ON SITE ALLOWED PARTICIPANTS TO INHABIT THE MEMORIAL FULLY, CREATING A LIVING, PARTICIPATORY TRIBUTE TO BOTH THE WHALES AND THE COMMUNITY THAT RESPONDED DURING THE ORIGINAL STRANDING.

ALEX SOUTH (CLARINET), NEREA BELLO (VOICE) AND, KATHERINE WREN (VIOLA) PERFORMED THEIR ORIGINAL COMPOSITION THROUGHOUT THE PERFORMANCE, WOVEN INTO EACH STAGE OF THE PROCESS, ENHANCING THE EMOTIONAL RESONANCE AND DEEPENING THE SENSE OF CONNECTION.

(5)



PHOTO: PROCESSION, LIVING MEMORIAL









# SCIENCE

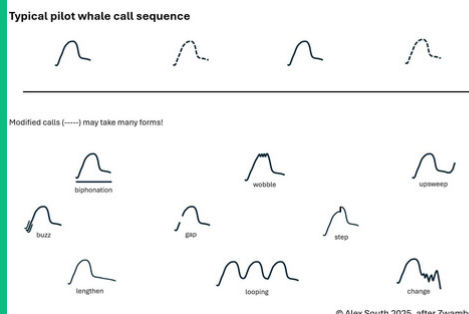
INFORMED BY SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

(6)

PHOTO: THE STRANDING GROUND



# SCIENTIFIC DATA



1)

2)

3)

4)

1) WOODEN FINS

SCOTTISH MARINE  
ANIMAL STRANDING  
SCHEME (SMASS)

WOODEN FINS PLACED ON THE BACK OF THE SAND WHALES SHARED SMASS DATA ABOUT EACH WHALES (ALONG WITH WORDS WRITTEN BY THE COMMUNITY).

2) THE STRANDING GROUND

SCOTTISH MARINE  
ANIMAL STRANDING  
SCHEME (SMASS)

A DATA-BASED VISUAL TRIBUTE, THE STRANDING GROUND USED MARKERS ON THE BEACH TO REPLICATE THE EXACT POSITIONS WHERE THE 55 LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALES WERE FOUND. EACH MARKER VISUALLY TRANSLATED SMASS DATA- SHARING LOCATION, AGE, SIZE, SEX, SOCIAL BONDS, AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COLOUR, SCALE, RIBBONS, AND TAGS. IN THIS WAY, SCIENTIFIC RECORDS BECAME AN IMMERSIVE, PARTICIPATORY MEMORIAL, ALLOWING PEOPLE TO STAND AMONG THE WHALES AND CONNECT WITH THEIR STORIES NOT JUST AS DATA, BUT AS LIVES LIVED AND LOST.

3) WOODEN MOULD

NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM, LONDON  
RICHARD SABIN  
ISABEL DAVIES

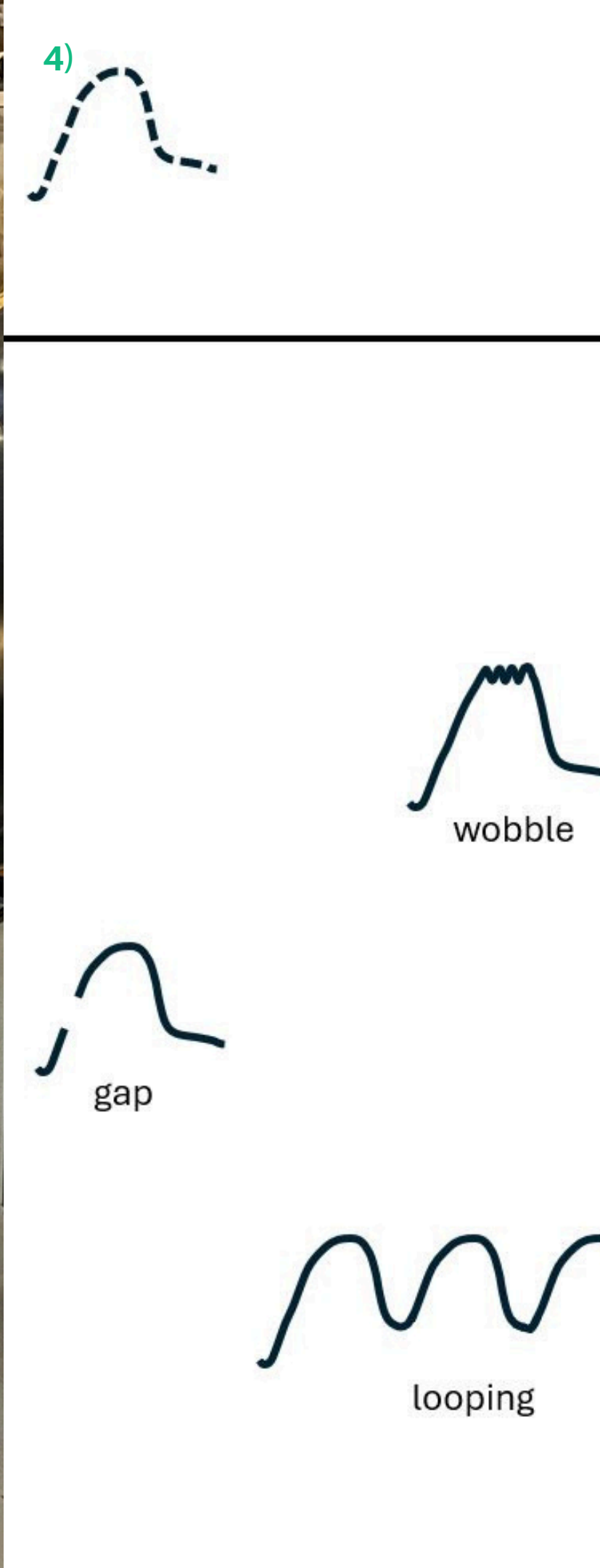
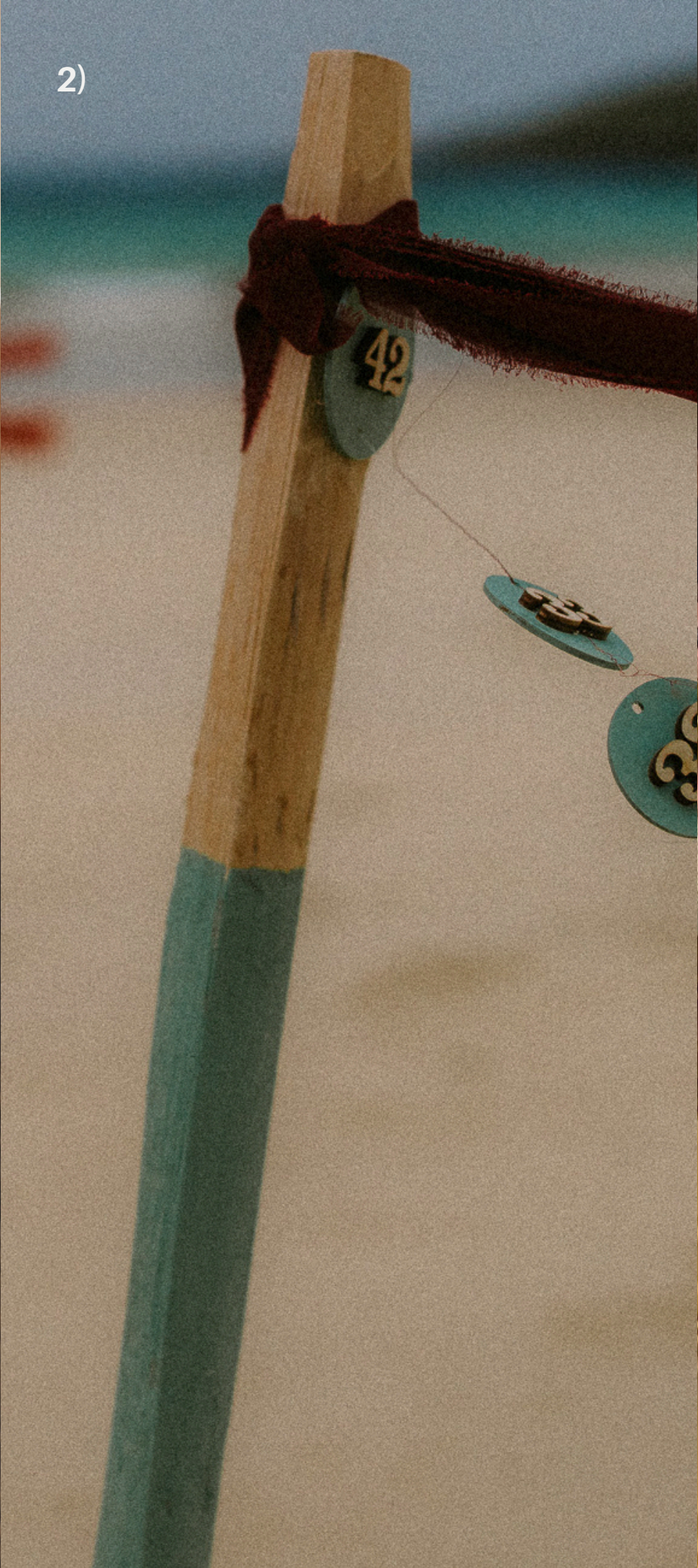
DEVELOPED FROM 3D SCANS TAKEN BY SAM OF THE NHM MODEL OF A LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE ORIGINALLY CAST IN THE 1930S BY NHM MODEL MAKER PERCY STAMMWITZ, FROM A REAL STRANDED WHALE IN WEXFORD. THE MOULDS LINK PAST AND PRESENT WAYS OF RECORDING STRANDINGS. THE WORK SYMBOLICALLY RESURRECTS THE INDIVIDUAL ANIMALS PRESERVED WITHIN COLLECTIONS, HIGHLIGHTING HOW HISTORIC SPECIMENS AND RECORDS REMAIN VITAL AND RELEVANT TODAY.

4) MUSIC

CAPE BRETON PILOT  
WHALE PROJECT AND  
HEIKE VESTER.

THE COMPOSITION DREW DIRECTLY ON SCIENTIFIC RECORDINGS OF PILOT WHALE VOCALISATIONS, CONTACT CALLS, WHISTLES, AND ECHOLOCATION CLICKS, USING THEIR PATTERNS AND REPETITIONS TO INFORM MELODIC FRAGMENTS AND IMPROVISATIONS, TRANSFORMING DATA INTO MUSIC.







# THE STRANDING GROUND

USING DETAILED DATA FROM THE SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING SCHEME (SMASS) ARTIST SAM GARE CREATED 'THE STRANDING GROUND', TRANSLATING THIS DATASET INTO A LARGE-SCALE INSTALLATION ON THE VERY STRETCH OF BEACH WHERE THE STRANDING TOOK PLACE. THE INSTALLATION WAS SITED SLIGHTLY UP THE SHORE FROM WHERE THE PUBLIC WERE CASTING THE SAND WHALES, ALLOWING A QUIETER AND MORE PRIVATE SPACE FOR REFLECTION.

EACH MARKER REPRESENTED ONE WHALE, PLACED IN THE EXACT POSITION WHERE IT WAS RECORDED. THE DESIGN ELEMENTS OF THE MARKERS ALLOWED VISITORS TO READ THE DATASET VISUALLY AND SPATIALLY.

BY COMBINING SPATIAL ACCURACY WITH THESE VISUAL CUES, SAM MADE THE SCIENTIFIC DATASET BOTH LEGIBLE AND TANGIBLE. VISITORS COULD WALK AMONG THE POSTS - THE WHALES, TRACING RELATIONSHIPS, SCALE, AND PROXIMITY, TRANSFORMING RAW DATA INTO A SHARED PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE.

(6)



## The Stranding Ground

*Where the whales lay – a data-based visual tribute*

On this part of the beach, you are standing among the whales.

Each marker represents one of the 55 long-finned pilot whales who stranded here on 16 July 2023. Using data gathered by the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS), we've carefully recreated the positions where they were found—along with what we know about their age, size, sex, and social bonds. Here, science and art come together to tell a fuller story—not just their final positions, but the relationships, histories, and bonds they carried.

This is more than data. It's a story.



The **height of each post** shares the whale's life stage:

- Tall posts = adults
- Short posts = juveniles

The **length of the ribbon** reflects the whale's size. Each ribbon measures one metre—so more ribbons mean a larger whale.

The **colour of the ribbon** represents family clusters—groups of whales who were directly related.

**Coloured posts** highlight mother and juvenile pairs, showing how close—or how far apart—they ended up on the beach.

The large circle tag on each post shares the whale's ID number. Smaller tags attached to these share the whale's offspring



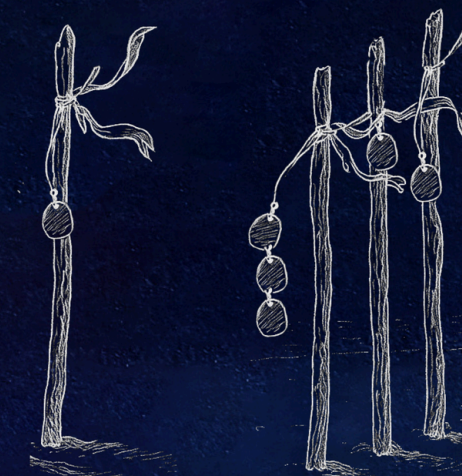
The colour of the tag shares the whale's sex. The teal tag shows the whale was female



The colour of the tag shares the whale's sex - orange tag shows the whale was male



The blue tag shows if the whale was pregnant



We would like to thank the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS) for their invaluable contribution to this work, and Dr Rachel Ball for determining the genetic relationships as part of SMASS's investigations into the stranding event.





# OUTREACH

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLWORKSHOPS

(7)

PHOTO: IN THE WAKE OF WHALES SCHOOL WORKSHOP



# 'IN THE WAKE OF WHALES' WORKSHOPS

ARTIST SAM GARE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED WORKSHOPS THAT CREATED LIFE-SIZED CARDBOARD WHALE PUPPETS WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.

SCHOOLS COULD CHOOSE FROM THREE BESPOKE WORKSHOPS:

- MARINE MYSTERY, WHERE PUPILS BECAME 'MARINE DETECTIVES' INVESTIGATING THE CAUSES OF STRANDINGS
- WHALE ECOLOGY & ART, WHERE CHILDREN LEARNED ABOUT PILOT WHALE BEHAVIOUR BEFORE DECORATING THEIR OWN 2.5M WHALE PUPPETS WITH THE IMAGINED LIFE OF THE WHALES
- PERFORMANCE & PUPPETRY, WHERE THE PUPPETS BECAME CHARACTERS IN SHORT PLAYS WITH MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

WE APPROACHED EIGHT SCHOOLS ACROSS LEWIS, HARRIS, AND UIST, WITH FOUR TAKING PART, INVOLVING 121 PUPILS FROM SIX CLASSES (PRIMARY 4-5).

ALONGSIDE THIS, THREE OPEN COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS DURING THE OUTER HEBRIDES WILDLIFE FESTIVAL INVITED PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO CO-CREATE A 2.5M 'COMMUNITY ISLAND WHALE' FOR UIST, HARRIS, AND LEWIS.

AT 'KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING' ALL EIGHT LIFE-SIZED PUPPETS WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER, REUNITING THIS ISLAND-WIDE POD IN A COLLECTIVE ACT OF CREATIVITY, IMAGINATION AND REMEMBRANCE.

(7)



PHOTO: IN THE WAKE OF WHALES COMMUNITY WORKSHOP



# COMMUNITY VOICES

(8)

PHOTO: AOIFE GLASS  
AND SAM GARE  
RECORDING AUDIO



# TESTIMONIES

(8)

A VITAL STRAND OF THE PROJECT HAS BEEN THE GATHERING OF ORAL TESTIMONIES FROM THOSE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE 2023 MASS STRANDING, ALONGSIDE ISLANDERS WHO HOLD MEMORIES OF WHALES AND STRANDINGS FROM ACROSS THE YEARS. THESE STORIES CARRY NOT JUST INFORMATION, BUT THE EMOTION, MEMORY, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ENCOUNTERS THAT HAVE MARKED COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS ALIKE. RECORDING AND SHARING THEM PRESERVES AN IMPORTANT LAYER OF HUMAN AND NATURAL HERITAGE, ENSURING THESE VOICES ARE NOT LOST WITH TIME.

THIS WORK HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF AOIFE GLASS, WHO HAS ALSO BEEN DEVELOPING THE PODCAST KEENING: VOICES OF THE STRANDING, WHERE MANY OF THESE TESTIMONIES WILL ALSO BE SHARED.

PHOTO: RECORDING TESTIMONIES



AS PART OF THE MEMORIAL, COMMUNITY MEMBERS WERE INVITED TO WRITE PERSONAL MESSAGES, WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE, GRATITUDE, SORROW, OR HOPE, ON SEA RIBBONS. THESE WERE TIED TO THE WOODEN CARRYING PLATFORM, CARRYING INDIVIDUAL VOICES TO THE SHORELINE IN A SHARED ACT OF REMEMBRANCE.

LOOKING AHEAD, WE ARE SEEKING FUNDING TO DEVELOP 'THE KEENING CLOTH' - A COMMUNITY WEAVING CREATED WITH LOCAL WEAVER ELISABETH PHILIPPS AND PROJECT ARTIST SAM GARE. THIS WORK WILL BRING TOGETHER SEA RIBBON MESSAGES, ORAL TESTIMONIES, AND ELEMENTS OF THE SHORELINE TO FORM A LASTING MEMORIAL - A TACTILE RECORD OF GRIEF, MEMORY, AND RESILIENCE.

# SEA RIBBONS

(8)



PHOTO: SEA RIBBONS



# IMPACT: FIGURES



PEOPLE DIRECTLY ENGAGED

307

ISLE OF LEWIS POPULATION REACHED

1.65%

SCHOOL PUPILS ENGAGED

121

POTENTIAL DIGITAL AUDIENCE

11,000+

ORAL HISTORIES RECORDED

8

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS DELIVERED

11

(9)



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IN 1913, THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (NHM), LONDON, BECAME THE BIRTHPLACE FOR THE RECORDING AND STUDY OF STRANDINGS AROUND THE BRITISH ISLES. FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, THE NHM CETACEA RESEARCH COLLECTION HAS BEEN A REPOSITORY FOR MATERIAL COLLECTED AS PART OF THOSE STUDIES, HOLDING SKELETONS AND CASTS OF ANIMALS WHOSE LIVES ENDED ON OUR SHORES. SAM GARE'S WORK REMINDS US OF THE HUMAN/ANIMAL INTERACTIONS AND EMOTIONS GENERATED BY THE LOSS OF THESE LIVES. IT'S FITTING THAT SAM IS WORKING DIRECTLY WITH MATERIAL FROM THE NHM.

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**RICHARD SABIN**  
**PRINCIPAL CURATOR, MAMMALS, VERTEBRATES**  
**DIVISION, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (NHM),**  
**LONDON**



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I FOUND THE BEACH EVENT PROFOUNDLY LOVELY—CALM, BEAUTIFUL, AND DEEPLY POSITIVE. THE WEATHER HEIGHTENED THE CONTRAST WITH THE EVENTS ON THAT BEACH TWO YEARS AGO. I WAS ESPECIALLY STRUCK BY THE MAKER POSTS AND FLAGS: I APPRECIATE IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN INTENDED AS SUCH BUT IT WAS A POWERFUL PIECE OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION THAT CONVEYED THE SCALE AND EXTENT OF THE STRANDINGS, WHILE VISUALLY SHOWING KINSHIP AND POD STRUCTURE. IT WAS ALSO AMONG THE MOST REMARKABLE WORKS OF ART I'VE ENCOUNTERED—QUIETLY POWERFUL AND DEEPLY AFFECTING. WALKING THROUGH THE MARKER FLAGS, ON THAT GLORIOUS WARM SUMMER AFTERNOON AT THAT LIMINAL PLACE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS WAS AN EXPERIENCE I WILL NOT FORGET. THANK YOU FOR MAKING THAT HAPPEN.

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**ANDREW BROWNLOW**  
SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING  
SCHEME (SMASS)

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IN JULY 2023, SMASS RESPONDED TO THE STRANDING OF 55 LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALES ON NORTH TOLSTA BEACH ON THE ISLE OF LEWIS, WHICH AT THAT TIME WAS THE LARGEST MASS STRANDING EVENT WE HAD EVER RESPONDED TO. WHILE THIS IS OF COURSE A TRAGIC LOSS OF LIFE, THESE EVENTS ALSO PROVIDE A VERY UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE NOT ONLY WHY THESE ANIMALS STRANDED, BUT ALSO HOW THEY LIVED BEFORE THE STRANDING. WHEN SAM AND HER TEAM REACHED OUT ABOUT THE PROJECT WE WERE EXCITED TO GET INVOLVED AND CONTRIBUTE THE SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION THAT UNDERPINS THE STORIES OF THESE INDIVIDUAL ANIMALS THAT DIED IN THE STRANDING. WE ARE VERY HAPPY WE CAN SHARE THE FINDINGS OF OUR RESEARCH TO TELL THE STORY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS THROUGH KEENING: THE SONG OF THE STRANDING.

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**MARIEL T.I. TEN DOESCHATE**  
SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING  
SCHEME (SMASS)





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WHILE I WASN'T HERE WHEN THE STRANDING HAPPENED (THANKFULLY), IT WAS VERY EMOTIONAL TO REFLECT ON WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW MANY PEOPLE TRIED TO HELP THAT DAY. PUTTING THE STICKS IN THE SAND WHERE EACH WHALE LAY REALLY HIGHLIGHTED THE SIZE OF THE AREA, THE NUMBER OF WHALES INVOLVED, AND THE RIBBONS SHOWING THE FAMILY GROUPS WAS INCREDIBLY INTERESTING AS WELL AS SAD BUT IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE I WAS GLAD TO BE PART OF.

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**MICHELLE STAMP**  
**VOLUNTEER/NATURE SCOT**



# WITH THANKS



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



KEENING - SONG OF THE STRANDING IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM CREATIVE SCOTLAND'S OPEN FUND, HOPE SCOTT TRUST, ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF SCOTLAND 'MAKE IT HAPPEN FUND', AND INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN THE HUMANITIES (UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH). IT WAS DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING SCHEME (SMASS), AND THE OUTER HEBRIDES WILDLIFE FESTIVAL, AND WAS DEVELOPED IN THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S CETACEA COLLECTION, WITH ISABEL DAVIS IN THE COLLECTIONS AND CULTURE RESEARCH THEME AND PRINCIPAL CURATOR IN MAMMALS, RICHARD SABIN.



CREATIVE SCOTLAND IS THE PUBLIC BODY THAT SUPPORTS CULTURE AND CREATIVITY ACROSS ALL PARTS OF SCOTLAND, DISTRIBUTING FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL LOTTERY.



WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING SCHEME (SMASS) FOR THEIR INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THIS WORK, AND DR RACHEL BALL FOR DETERMINING THE GENETIC RELATIONSHIPS AS PART OF SMASS'S INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE STRANDING EVENT.



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PHOTO: SAM GARE SMALL WOODEN MOULDS