

A Conversation with Ron Hirschi, author of Ocean Seasons!



How did you become interested in oceans and ocean creatures?

I was born at the edge of the sea and live now on a small island not far from my childhood home. When I was six, I started rowing out onto the waters of western Washington and probably saw my first whale when I was two or three. I also began fishing at an early age and have had a lifelong love for all sea life that stems from these early experiences.

My degree is a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Washington, where I also spent two years in graduate study. Since leaving college in 1976, I have worked as a biologist, mainly studying and protecting fish and their habitats. In 1979, I was working in our local rainforest, observing the impacts of logging on streams. I was deeply saddened by the way in which timber companies thoughtlessly destroyed miles of salmon habitat. This experience angered me, but I was also inspired. Instead of acting out in a violent manner, I picked up a pencil in the days just before computers and began to write for kids and for their future.

I now divide my time between writing, working in schools, and environmental projects that often include kids and their parents. As Director of a small non-profit, I also try to help restore damaged habitats and have had a hand in protecting some valuable salmon streams near where my family first settled in the 1850s.

Tell us about *Ocean Seasons*.

Ocean Seasons follows the changes in seasons within the Pacific Ocean. It is centered in the northern reaches of the Pacific, but it also follows the path of migrating humpback whales as they seek the warm waters of Hawaii to give birth to their calves. While the book features the Pacific and Pacific species, the events that are portrayed take place in much the same way in all seas. In fact, many scientists remind us now that there is really only ONE ocean. If you trace your finger around the globe, you will not have to lift your finger from the great circle of blue surrounding the earth. We do have but one ocean, and all life within is connected.

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

I work with thousands of kids each year. They tell me about their fascination with

dolphins, whales, sharks, and other sea creatures. No matter where they live, the ocean seems to call to them, and I thought this book would help open their eyes to more of the beauty of the sea. I hope the book will let them know that seasons change in the seas just as they do on land.

What is your favorite thing about being an author?

Writing is a great joy for me, but I most enjoy working directly with kids and taking them outside during my many school visits. We net fish to study water quality or search for frogs and salamanders in small ponds. We also study ocean life, and it was on a recent trip to the beach with a group of elementary students that I got the idea for my newest book.

I think it is important for kids to learn as much as possible about the sea, so I chose humpback whales as the center of attention in the book because of their great appeal. Many scientists now regard the world's oceans as one continuous body of water. This "One Ocean" concept isn't directly discussed in my book, but it is at its heart. The whales treat the sea as one huge chunk of water. When northern winters make life difficult, they simply turn south and swim to warmer waters. Their seasonal movements reflect the changes in plankton, kelp, and tiny fish that provide their food supply. I've included many creatures bound together in the mix of seasons, food webs, and habitats linked beneath the waves.



Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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