

OPERATION 'BREAK-THROUGH' -- SAVE THE GREY WHALES

Probably the two most popular California grey whales today among the 20,000 such whales in existence (this is the world's total grey whale population recorded in the international Red Book) are Crossbeak and Bonnet, saved by the Soviet icebreakers, "Admiral Makarov" and "Vladimir Arsenev". It is more than a matter of the two million dollars the operation is estimated to have cost.

Unfortunately, experts in both the United States and the Soviet Union have objected to what they regard as money wasted on rescuing the whales. One day of work in the ice by the two Soviet icebreakers costs 30,000 roubles. The Institute of the Arctic and Antarctic, which leases these two icebreakers, hastened to inform the steamship agency before the operation began that it would not foot the bill. Consequently, the Institute did not pay and the steamship agency had to absorb the cost, but the moral significance of the operation followed by hundreds of millions of people around the world is much more important than the cost in cold cash. That is why the Soviet icebreaker fleet has now been termed "the most humane fleet in the world" by Western reporters. Ships encountered in the open sea on the return voyage by the "Admiral Makarov" and "Vladimir Arsenev" hoisted their flags to them in greeting.

The U.S. News and World Report termed the joint whale rescue operation "heroic". The magazine also reported that this was not the first such expedition to rescue marine mammals.