

# Biologist follows true survivors

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A grey seal pup lounges on Hay Island off the eastern coast of Cape Breton in February. (CHRISTIAN LAFORCE / Staff)

Anna Magera has learned human activity and the lives of marine mammals are interconnected.

And the fisheries biologist also knows the survival of some species of sea creatures can be an astonishing thing.

Magera, who lived in Halifax when she was a graduate student, said Tuesday that research she and others did about recoveries in marine mammal populations showed such commercial activity as shipping, offshore energy exploration and pollution have adversely affected some species.

“However, it seems a number of populations have come back after being heavily depleted,” she said.

The Dalhousie University alumna is working in Iqaluit, for the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, but research she finished in 2011 as part of her master’s thesis at the Halifax school has recently been published in an online peer-reviewed journal.

Marine mammals in waters off North America, Europe and Australia were studied during the recovery-trend project.

The researchers’ paper, in the journal Plos One, says “marine mammals have greatly benefited from a shift from resource exploitation towards conservation.”

The article, however, also says marine mammals have historically been sources of prized commodities for people in various regions of the world. It says “a handful of species have become globally extinct.”

“We’ve had a lot of interaction with marine mammals, and, in some cases, marine mammals have been very heavily depleted ... and some have been entirely wiped out,” Magera said in a phone interview.

Then there are the true survivors.

“Some of these population recoveries — for example, in the case of a number of sea otter populations in the Pacific North-west — have been quite amazing,” said Magera, a native of Edmonton, who earned her undergraduate degree at the University of British Columbia.

“A number of these recoveries happened after heavy exploitation was reduced or stopped, and management measures were brought in.”

The bottom line?