



NOAA

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Whale spotted near Ni`ihau marks an early start of the whale season in Hawai`i

Researchers aboard NOAA Ship *Hi`ialakai* spotted the first humpback whale of the season off Ni`ihau on their journey home from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

“Humpback whales remind us that this is one contiguous archipelago,” said Randall Kosaki Ph.D., NOAA’s deputy superintendent of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and chief scientist of the expedition. “These whales seamlessly use both the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and the inhabited Hawaiian islands.”

Another sighting of an adult humpback whale was reported a few days later near the Pacific Missile Range Facility off the southwest coast of Kauai, by Captain Sterling Silva aboard the Captain Andy’s Sailing Adventures. Whale behaviors observed included a breach, a pectoral slap and a dive.

Humpback whale season in Hawai`i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. More than 10,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year.

With the arrival of humpback whale season in Hawai`i, ocean users are reminded to keep a safe distance from these annual visitors to the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

Boaters are reminded to post a lookout at all times throughout the year, not just when whales are visiting our waters. An extra set of eyes scanning the waters ahead and to the side of a boat can prevent collisions with marine life, obstructions, divers and other vessels.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawai`i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

Ed Lyman, marine mammal response manager for the sanctuary, said ocean users such as those that reported the whale sightings are a great resource in helping monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary. “By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing the initial documentation and assessment on the animal, ocean users are the foundation of our conservation efforts,” Lyman said.

If you come across an injured or entangled marine mammal, please maintain the required safe distance and call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline at 888-256-9840 immediately, or the U.S. Coast Guard on channel 16. If reporting a suspected approach zone violation, please call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

“It’s important for everyone to be extra vigilant during whale season, for their own safety and the protection of the animals,” said Malia Chow, sanctuary superintendent.

The sanctuary is administered by a partnership of NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai`i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). The sanctuary works to

protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship. Join us on [Facebook](#).

DLNR's mission is to enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawaii's unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of visitors and the people of Hawaii nei. Join us on [Facebook](#).

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and our other [social media channels](#)

On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

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