



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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Volunteers Count Whales in the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Over 570 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O‘ahu, Kaua‘i, and Hawai‘i Island for today’s annual Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count. Participants tallied humpback whale sightings and documented the animals’ surface behavior during the last survey of the 2012 whale season. The sanctuary, which is jointly managed by NOAA and the state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve, and nurse their young.

Up to 12,000 humpback whales are found in Hawaiian waters every year. They return to their birthplace every year between November and May after migrating from as far away as Alaska.

Volunteers collected data from 57 sites statewide. The following are the average numbers of whales sighted per 15-minute count period on each of the islands:

Hawai‘i Island – 1 whale
Kaua‘i – 1 whale
O‘ahu – 1 whale

Scientific studies have shown the humpback whale population in Hawai‘i is increasing at an annual rate of approximately seven percent. Over time, data from the Sanctuary Ocean Count can be used to corroborate these findings. Hawaiian waters provide critical breeding habitat for approximately two-thirds of the north Pacific stock of humpback whales.

“Today’s event capped off a successful season with over 2,000 volunteers participating and observing humpback whales displaying a variety of behaviors, as well other marine wildlife including Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, spinner dolphins and many sea birds” said Christine Brammer, sanctuary ocean count project manager. “High winds made viewing challenging along some coastlines around the state.”

For more information on becoming a volunteer for the 2013 Sanctuary Ocean Count visit sanctuaryoceancount.org or call 1-888-55-WHALE ext. 253.

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On the Web:

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