



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
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Volunteers Count Whales in NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Over 950 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O'ahu, Kaua'i, and Hawai'i Island for Saturday's annual Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count. Participants tallied humpback whale sightings and documented the animals' surface behavior during the survey. 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 to May after migrating from as far away as Alaska. Due to their increasing numbers, boaters and other ocean users are asked to remain vigilant to avoid hitting or disturbing these endangered whales that are protected by federal and state laws.

Volunteers collected data from 61 sites statewide. The following are the average numbers of whales sighted per 15-minute count period on each of the islands:

Hawai'i Island – **3** whales

Kaua'i – **8** whales

O'ahu – **2** whales

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.

"It was great to see so many new volunteers taking part in this month's count," said Chris Brammer, sanctuary ocean count project manager. "The Sanctuary Ocean Count project provides a unique opportunity for the public to learn about humpbacks in Hawai'i while participating in a monitoring effort. Many volunteers that try out the project come back year after year. It is easy to get hooked on watching humpback whales."

Weather conditions were excellent for viewing humpback whales around the state. Other marine wildlife seen during the Sanctuary Ocean Count included Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, spinner dolphins, and a variety of sea birds.

Two more Sanctuary Ocean Counts are scheduled to take place on Saturday, February 25 and March 31. For more information on becoming a Sanctuary Ocean Count volunteer visit sanctuaryoceancount.org or call 1-888-55-WHALE ext. 253. A whale count on Maui is conducted independently by the Pacific Whale Foundation.

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On the Web:

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