



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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Volunteers Count Whales in NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Over 800 volunteers gathered data from the shores of Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i 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 managed by NOAA, 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. 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 58 sites statewide. The following are the average numbers of whales sighted per 15-minute count period on each of the islands:

Hawai'i Island – 2 whales (affected by inclement weather)

Kaua'i – 4 whales

O'ahu – 4 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.

"This month's count was a great success," said Christine Brammer, sanctuary ocean count coordinator. "The Sanctuary Ocean Count project provides a unique opportunity for the public to learn about Hawai'i's humpbacks while participating in a monitoring effort. Although the population of humpback whales is increasing, entanglement and vessel collisions still threaten the whales."

Inclement weather conditions in some areas around the state affected visibility and therefore the number of whale sightings. Other marine wildlife seen during the Ocean Count included Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, spinner dolphins, and a variety of sea birds.

One more Sanctuary Ocean Count is scheduled to take place on Saturday, 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>