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Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count volunteers observe humpback whales from Kaua'i, O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Maui

More than 612 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i islands during the second event of the 2019 Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count, and on Maui with the Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation.

This is the first year that both counts are coordinated on the same days, ensuring the data from all main islands is collected simultaneously. It is also the first year that Pacific Whale Foundation is expanding their Great Whale Count on Maui from one month to three.

Combined, volunteers collected data from 55 sites across all the main islands. A total of 372 whale sightings were seen during the 8:30 am to 8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count. Sanctuary Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 43 sites on the islands of Hawai'i, O'ahu and Kaua'i on February 23. A total of 278 whale sightings were seen during the 8:30 am to 8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count. Great Whale Count volunteers collected data from 12 sites across Maui on February 23 during timed intervals 8:30 am and 11:50 am. A total of 774 whales were seen throughout the day, with 94 whales counted during the 8:30 am to 8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

Weather conditions were nearly perfect for viewing whales across majority of the islands. Although several sites on Maui and Hawai'i island did experience some rain during the event. During the count on Maui, a humpback whale mother was spotted conducting "fluke-up feeding" with her calf at the Ma'alaea site, a breaching manta ray was seen from the McGregor Point scenic lookout, and a pod of dolphins swam by the Kihei Surfside site. A variety of other species were also spotted during the count including ( e.g.: *sea turtles, spinner dolphins, Hawaiian monk seals, a manta ray, multiple sea bird species and more.*)

Ocean Count promotes public awareness about humpback whales, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities. Volunteer participants tally humpback whale sightings and document the animals' surface behavior during the survey, which provides a snapshot of humpback whales activity from the shorelines of O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i islands. Ocean Count is supported by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

The annual Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation brings volunteers together to count whales from shore as part of a long-term survey of humpback whales in Hawaii, with 12 survey sites along the shoreline of Maui. This event provides a snapshot of trends in relative abundance of whales and is one of the world's longest-running citizen scientist projects.

Both counts will take place three times during peak whale season: the last Saturdays in January, February, and March of 2019.

Preliminary data detailing Sanctuary Ocean Count whale sightings by site location are available at:

<https://oceancount.org/resources/>. Additional information will be available on Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's website at [hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov](http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov). Pacific Whale Foundation's Great Whale Count data may be found at [mauiwhalefestival.org/greatwhalecount/](http://mauiwhalefestival.org/greatwhalecount/) with additional information at [pacificwhale.org](http://pacificwhale.org).

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, which is administered by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve and nurse their young.

With a mission to protect the ocean through science and advocacy, and to inspire environmental stewardship, Pacific Whale Foundation (PWF) conducts Research, Education and Conservation programs for the communities in which it serves. Founded by Greg Kaufman in 1980 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the world's whales from extinction, PWF now operates a social enterprise that offers fee-based programs and services through PacWhale Eco-Adventures to help fund its nonprofit work. Combined with memberships, donations, charitable grants and a remarkable group of dedicated volunteers, PWF now reaches more than 400,000 individuals each year through its Maui and Australia offices and research projects in Ecuador and Chile.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Foundation directly supports national marine sanctuaries by protecting species, conserving ecosystems and preserving America's maritime heritage through on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs and scientific research and exploration.

PHOTOS AVAILABLE

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