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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 430 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i islands during the third and final 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.

Combining the peak whale sighting periods from both counts, a total of 109 whales were reported from all participating islands. Combined, volunteers collected data from 54 sites across all the main islands.

Sanctuary Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 42 sites on the islands of Hawai'i, O'ahu and Kaua'i on March 30. 73 whale sightings were seen during the 9:00 - 9:15 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 March 30. 36 whales were counted during both the 10:00 - 10:15 am and 10:30 - 10:45 am time periods (a tie!) A total of 219 whales were seen from Maui throughout the day.

Weather conditions were sunny with light trade winds at nearly all sites throughout the main Hawaiian Islands. Very good whale viewing conditions throughout the counts. A variety of other species were also spotted during the count including sea turtles, spinner dolphins, Hawaiian monk seals, flying fish and an array of sea bird species.

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 annually on the last Saturdays in January, February, and March.

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.

Pacific Whale Foundation's Great Whale Count data may be found at mauiwhalefestival.org/greatwhalecount/ with additional information at pacificwhale.org.

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.

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