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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 550 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i islands during the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count and, from Maui during the Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation, the first of three coordinated whale counts between the two organizations in 2020.

This is the second year that both counts are coordinated on the same days, ensuring the data from all the main Hawaiian Islands are collected simultaneously.

Volunteers collected data from 53 sites across all the main Hawaiian Islands. A total of 279 whale sightings were seen during the 8:30-8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On the islands of Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i, Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 41 sites; a total of 148 whale sightings were seen during the 8:30-8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count. On Maui, Great Whale Count volunteers collected data from 12 sites during 15-minute intervals between 8:30 am and 11:50 am. A total of 135 whale sightings were seen during the 9:00-9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

Weather conditions varied but majority of sites had beautiful, clear and sunny with low wind, great weather for spotting whales. High surf, haze and rain were present at several sites which were unfavorable conditions for spotting whales. Turtles, sea birds, flying fish, and spotted/spinner dolphins were seen at multiple sites across the main Hawaiian Islands. Some volunteers even saw an endangered Hawaiian monk seal at a handful of sites!

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.

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 Hawai'i, 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 2020.

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

Preliminary data detailing Sanctuary Ocean Count whale sightings by site location and volunteer sign-up are available at: <https://oceancount.org>. Additional information will be available on Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's website at hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov.

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

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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