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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 650 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 second 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 51 sites across all the main Hawaiian Islands. A total of 191 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 39 sites; a total of 138 whale sightings were seen during the 8:30-8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count. Volunteers were also able to educate 647 members of the public who stopped by for more information during the 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 70 whale sightings were seen during the 9:30-9:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

Across the main Hawaiian Islands, weather conditions were partly cloudy with rain showers and areas of high wind, making for challenging sighting conditions. Several sites were impacted and had to cancel the count or dismiss the count early due to strong winds and heavy rain. Pacific Whale Foundation Chief Biologist, Stephanie Stack notes that "due to the poor visibility today, our count is likely an under-estimation of the number of whales present in Maui Nui". The same also applies for the islands of Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i. Although, weather conditions were not ideal for viewing whales at majority of sites, folks were still able to spot some whales in addition to other species. Sea turtles, spinner dolphins, Hawaiian monk seals and several sea birds such as frigate birds, shearwaters, albatross and more were seen at multiple sites across the main Hawaiian Islands.

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.

PHOTOS ATTACHED

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