

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT

Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count Conclude for the 2023 Whale Season!

March 25, 2023

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

320 volunteers gathered data from the shores of Kaua'i, O'ahu 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 last of three coordinated whale counts between the two organizations in 2023. This is the first year since March 2020 that both programs will be resuming normal operations.

This is the fifth 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 42 sites across all the main Hawaiian Islands on March 25. A total of 169 whales were observed during the 8:30 -8:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On the islands of Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Hawai'i, Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 30 sites; a total of 117 whales were observed 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 55 whales were observed during the 9:00-9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On Kaua'i, the total number of whales observed during the day's count was 273, on O'ahu, the total was 467, and Hawai'i 68. The total number for the Great Whale Count on Maui was 313, for a grand total of 1,121 throughout the state. This number may represent duplicate sightings of the same whale by different observers or at different time periods or different locations throughout the day.

Data collected during the Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count combined with other research efforts can help reveal trends in humpback whale occurrence within and amongst whale seasons.

Across the main Hawaiian Islands, weather conditions were primarily clear and sunny skies with calm seas making it ideal for observing whales. Due to the ideal weather conditions a lot of humpback whale activity was observed during the day's count. A variety of other species were also spotted during the count including honu (green sea turtles), nai'a (spinner dolphins), mālolo

(Hawaiian flying fish) and multiple bird species such as 'iwa (great frigatebird), mōlī (Laysan albatross), kōlea (Pacific golden plover), Nēnē (Hawaiian goose), manu o Kū (white tern), 'Ua'u kani (wedge-tailed shearwater) and more.

Ocean Count promotes public awareness about humpback whales, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities. Volunteers 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 Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Hawai'i islands. Ocean Count is supported by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

The Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation had site leaders 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 community science projects.

Both counts take place three times during peak whale season annually on the last Saturday 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 is available on the sanctuary's website at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

Pacific Whale Foundation's Great Whale Count data may be found at <https://www.pacificwhale.org/research/community-science/> with additional information at www.mauiwhalefestival.org

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, 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.

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

On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary:

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources: <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dar/>

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