

Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count Conclude for the 2025 Koholā Season!

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

363 volunteers gathered data from the shores of Kaua'i, O'ahu, Moloka'i and Hawai'i islands during the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count and from Maui and Lāna'i during the Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation, the last of three coordinated whale counts between the two organizations in 2025.

This is the seventh 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 41 sites across all the main Hawaiian Islands on March 29. A total of 109 whales were observed during the 9:30 - 9:45 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On the islands of Kaua'i, O'ahu, Moloka'i and Hawai'i, Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 29 sites; a total of 52 whales were observed during both the 8:30 - 8:45 am and 9:30 - 9:45 am time periods, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On Maui and Lāna'i, Great Whale Count volunteers collected data from 12 sites during 15-minute intervals between 8:30 am and 11:50 am. A total of 61 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 across 10 sites was 122, on O'ahu, across 10 sites the total was 220, on Moloka'i across 1 site, the total was 11 and Hawai'i 28 across 8 sites. The total number for the Great Whale Count across 11 sites on Maui was 307, and 1 site on Lāna'i was 26, for a grand total of 714 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 mostly sunny paired with light winds, calm seas and some vog which was decent conditions for observing whales. A variety of other species were also spotted during the count including honu (green sea turtles), 'ilioholoikauaua (Hawaiian monk seals), manō (shark), nai'a (spinner dolphins), and multiple bird species such as 'iwa (great frigatebird), mōlī (Laysan albatross), koa'e 'ula (red-tailed tropic bird), nēnē (Hawaiian goose), manu-o-kū (white tern) and more.

Ocean Count promotes public awareness about humpback whales, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities.

Site leaders 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, Moloka'i 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 and a site on the shoreline of Lāna'i. 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 Hawai'i DLNR's 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.

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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