

Vessel Helps to Better Understand and Protect Humpback Whales



Photo: HIHWNMS, MMHSRP Permit #932-1489

Specially trained responders work to free a whale entangled in ropes.

The Mission

The Hawaiian Islands are important habitat for humpback whales (*koholā*) providing critical breeding grounds for the endangered animal. Up to 12,000 of the 20,000 humpback whales found in the North Pacific are found in Hawaiian waters every year from November to April where they breed, give birth and nurse their young.

Every year there are reports of whales that have become entangled in ropes or nets. Research by sanctuary staff estimate that in some regions over 50% of humpback whales have been recently entangled. Sanctuary staff have expertise in disentangling whales and work to understand the cause. The goal is to reduce the threat of entanglements, which is estimated to kill over 300,000 cetaceans worldwide every year.

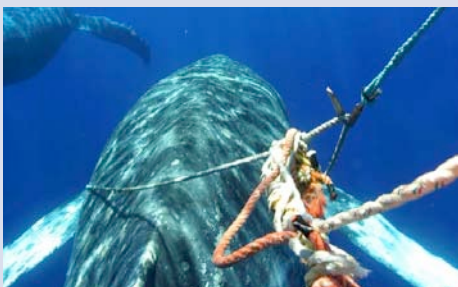


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Underwater photo of a humpback whale being cut free from entangling rope.



Photo: Silver Ships

The new sanctuary vessel is designed specifically for working around 40-ton humpback whales.

A Specialized Vessel

This 11-meter vessel was specifically built and customized for large whale response, disentanglement and research for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. Based in the heart of the sanctuary, the vessel's homeport will be primarily in Maui at Mā'alaea Harbor near the sanctuary's Kihei facilities.

- True turn-key response boat ready to respond immediately.
- Built-in storage for 15-foot rapid deployment inflatable.
- Davit for lifting heavy equipment.
- Custom designed upper helm station provides the boat operator with excellent visibility for safe operation around whales.
- Multiple stations for observers.
- Versatile platform for tagging, observation, health assessment and response to marine mammals in distress.
- Support for research and monitoring of fish, corals and maritime heritage resources through dive ops by cooperating partners.

Specifications

Vessel Name: Koholā
Builder: Silver Ships Inc.
Delivery: July 2011
Hull Material: Aluminum, hybrid air and foam collar
Length: 38' - 1"
Beam: 10' - 4"
Draft: 3.80 ft
Engines: Envinrude E-Tec
Propulsion: Twin outboards
Maximum Speed: 25 knots
Range: 200 nautical miles
Accommodations: 1-2 crew, 9-10 passengers



R/V Koholā



Launching of an Unmanned Aerial System (UAV) from the *R/V Koholā* on the North Shore of O'ahu. This demonstration of the UAV was to show the ability of using these small planes for identifying marine debris at sea and for surveying for marine animals.



The *R/V Koholā* will be used to support diving missions such as this technical rebreather dive training off of Honolulu, as well as scientific monitoring of corals, fish, algae and even maritime heritage resources such as shipwrecks.

2013 Activities

Humpback Whale Research – Primarily January through March, the peak season.

Visual health assessment including full body scar analysis to determine entanglement rates.
Sensory capabilities of humpback whales to determine ability for detection of entanglement gear.
Photo ID, photogrammetry (sizing), pregnancy tests.

Large Whale Response - November through April

Based in Mā'alaea Harbor the *R/V Koholā* is available for turn-key operation in order to minimize response time to entangled or distressed (vessel-struck) humpback whales. It is crucial that response time is reduced, since a humpback whale can travel up to 3-1/2 miles in one-hour, expanding the search area to 34 square miles from the original sighting.

Supporting Research in the Sanctuary

The *R/V Koholā* will be selectively used year around by partners who provide research or monitoring efforts that contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the sanctuary.