



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Claire Kavanaugh
(808) 397-2651 ext. 249
or (518) 527-4498

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2011

Volunteers Count Whales in NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Over 800 volunteers gathered data from the shores of Oahu, Kauai, and the Big Island for Saturday's annual Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count. Participants tallied humpback whale sightings and documented the animals' surface behavior during the survey. The sanctuary, which is managed by NOAA, protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve, and nurse their young.

Volunteers collected data from 62 sites statewide. Every 15 minutes, an average of 5 whales were counted per site statewide. The following are the average numbers of whales sighted per 15-minute count period on each of the islands:

O'ahu – 5 whales

Kaua'i – 5 whales

Big Island – 4 whales

"Volunteers around the state reported perfect viewing conditions for the second count of 2011," said Claire Kavanaugh, sanctuary ocean count project coordinator. "On such a beautiful day, volunteers also noticed many boats on the water, which serves as a great reminder for mariners and other ocean users to be mindful of whales while out on the water during whale season (November to May). In Hawaii, it is illegal to approach a humpback whale closer than 100 yards by sea and 1,000 feet by air."

Scientific studies have shown that Hawaii's humpback whale population has been increasing at an annual rate of approximately seven percent. Currently, as many as 12,000 north Pacific humpbacks visit Hawaiian waters each year to mate, calve and nurse their young. The Sanctuary Ocean Count project provides a unique opportunity for the public to learn about Hawaii's humpbacks while participating in a monitoring effort. The data collected is used to corroborate existing scientific data and provide information on how humpbacks use near-shore waters.

One more Sanctuary Ocean Count is scheduled to take place on Saturday, March 26. For more information on becoming a Sanctuary Ocean Count volunteer visit sanctuaryoceancount.org or contact the appropriate sanctuary office. On the Big Island, call 1-888-55-WHALE ext. 253. On Oahu, call 397-2651 ext. 253. On Kauai, call 1-808-246-2860. A whale count on Maui is conducted independently by the Pacific Whale Foundation.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaa>.

On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>