

February 15, 2021

Ocean users urged to use care as abundance of mother/calf pairs are seen in Hawai'i

An abundance of mother/calf pairs have been recently observed in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and nearby waters.

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. Thousands of humpback whales return to Hawaiian waters each year to breed, give birth, and nurse their young.

Keep a safe distance

With recent reports of multiple mother/calf pairs in Hawai'i, ocean users are reminded to keep a safe distance from these annual visitors to Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. Collisions with vessels are a risk to both the animals and humans.

Boaters are reminded to post a lookout at all times throughout the year, not just when whales are visiting our waters. An extra set of eyes scanning the waters ahead and to the side of a boat can prevent collisions with marine life, obstructions, divers and other vessels. Slower speeds may also reduce the risk of collisions with the animals.

Humpback whales are protected in Hawai'i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on or in the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

Responsible viewing

"Responsible wildlife viewing and education promotes stewardship, helping protect these animals at a critical time in their lives, said Ed Lyman, Natural Resource Management Specialist for the sanctuary. "Ocean users play an important role by helping the sanctuary monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary and nearby waters."

"By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing initial documentation and assessment on the animal---from a safe and legal distance---ocean users act like first responders and are the foundation of our conservation efforts," he said.

If you see an entangled whale

An example is reporting humpback whales entangled in gear. Entanglement may not impact the animal immediately, but can result in starvation, physical trauma and infections, and may contribute to vessel strikes since the animals are less mobile.

The Hawaiian Islands Large Whale Entanglement Response Network, a community-based effort led by the sanctuary, supports large whale entanglement response efforts statewide under the authorization of a permit from NOAA Fisheries and their Marine Mammal Health and

Stranding Response Program. The network involves many state and federal agencies, including the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office, and the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as private non-governmental organizations, fishermen, researchers and other individuals.

Contact the experts

Whale rescue is complex and dangerous for the whale rescuers as well as the animal. If you see an injured or entangled marine mammal, keep a safe and legal distance, and call NOAA's 24/7 Marine Wildlife Hotline at 888-256-9840 or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF channel 16 immediately. **Do not enter the water or try to disentangle a whale yourself.** People have been killed. Removing buoys or portions of trailing gear may actually do more harm than good, as doing so leaves lethal wraps behind with less likelihood that the animal will be re-sighted. The best way to help an entangled whale is to report the sighting immediately, alerting authorized responders who have training, experience and that are well-equipped the opportunity to not only free the animal of all gear, but gain valuable information towards reducing the threat.

If you are reporting a vessel coming too close to a whale, call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964 or email respectwildlife@noaa.gov. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at <https://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/visit/recreation.html>.

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i through the Division of Aquatic Resources. The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales and their habitat through research, education, conservation and stewardship.

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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/>