The sanctuary protects humpback whales and their habitat by working with the community to reduce harmful impacts and monitor their health. Sanctuary programs focus on educating the public about humpback whales in Hawaii and other ocean life. The sanctuary enhances awareness of Native Hawaiian culture and its values to protect humpback whales and the marine life of Hawaii. Research is conducted by the sanctuary and its partners to broaden the understanding and protection of humpback whales.

A SPECIAL PLACE
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary protects one of the world’s most important humpback whale habitats. Between November and April, more than half of the North Pacific humpback whale population returns here to mate, give birth, and nurse their young. The sanctuary is co-managed by NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawaii’s Department of Land and Natural Resources.

TO LEARN MORE
Stop by our visitor centers to learn more about Hawaii and its unique marine environment. Its cultural significance, and how your national marine sanctuary and marine national monument are protecting these extremely important areas.

Sanctuary Visitor Center
The scenic beachfront visitor center in Kihei on Maui provides a unique setting to learn about the sanctuary, volunteer, discover, share knowledge about the marine environment.

Kalepolepo Fishpond
One of Maui’s last remaining Native Hawaiian fishponds is located in front of the sanctuary visitor center. Tours are offered by reservation.

Visit the sanctuary to:
• Learn about humpback whales and their habitat
• Observe whales in the wild
• Participate in wildlife conservation
• Experience Native Hawaiian culture

SANCTUARY VISITOR CENTER
Housed in a historic, century-old Koehnen Building, Mokupāpapa Discovery Center is a hands-on science and culture center for all ages. Spanning 6,500 square feet, the center features a 3,500-gallon saltwater aquarium, interactive educational exhibits. We esto

THINGS TO DO
Wildlife Viewing
Hawai’i’s marine environments nurture many marine species beyond humpback whales. In addition to large animals, Hawaiian waters are also home to important coral reefs, which sustain thousands of marine plants and animals. Extensive coral reef colonies are also found in the remote Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. This vast area supports a dynamic habitat containing an incredible diversity of coral, fish, birds, marine mammals, and other flora and fauna, many of which are unique to the Hawaiian Island chain. Hawaiian marine wildlife remains fragile and vulnerable. Care should be taken when viewing.

Whales & Dolphins*
• Over 20 species in Hawaiian waters
• Look for spouts and breaching
• Give them space, do not approach
• Rest even from boats

Hawaiian Monk Seals*
• Only about 1,400 remain
• You can see them
• Feed both during day and night
• Endemic - found nowhere else

Sea Turtles*
• More than 20 species
• Swims close to shore
• Requires air to breathe
• Rest on shore during the day

Seabirds & Shorebirds*
• Over 150 species
• Nest in coastal and upland areas
• Foraging, breeding, nesting habitats

Ocean Etiquette
• Keep your distance and watch quietly
• Keep pets on leash
• Don’t feed wildlife
• Dispose of trash properly

Volunteer
The sanctuary needs you! Be a volunteer and participate in wildlife monitoring, beach cleanups, and more. Contact us to learn about great opportunities.

Protecting Humpback Whales
Federal and state regulations prohibit approaching humpback whales by any means within 100 yards or within 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. Approaching a humpback whale within 100 yards by any means within 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft results in a fine of up to $17,000 and/or 6 months in jail.

All whales, dolphins, and seals are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which is the federal law that protects marine mammals. Marine mammals include humpback whales, dolphins, seals, sea lions, and other marine mammals.

To learn more about these and other marine species, visit one of our visitor centers, learn about Native Hawaiian culture, or explore our online resources. We also offer a variety of educational programs for all ages.

For more information:
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
330 South Kihei Road
Kīhei, Hawai‘i 96753
Phone: (808) 875-8866
Email: info@hhwh.noaa.gov

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources

Photo: Matt McIntosh/NOAA

Mokupāpapa Discovery Center
Housed in Hilo’s historic, century-old Koehnen Building, Mokupāpapa Discovery Center is a hands-on science and culture center for all ages. Spanning 6,500 square feet, the center features a 3,500-gallon saltwater aquarium, interactive educational exhibits, we esto

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Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources

Entanglement

A major threat faced by humpback whales is entanglement. Whales can get entangled in fishing gear, marine debris, and other items, which can lead to entanglement that can be fatal. The NOAA and the local communities work together to prevent entanglement and to remove entangled whales from the ocean.

Migration

The North Pacific population of humpback whales makes the longest migration of any mammal in the world. Each year, they travel from the warm waters off the coast of Hawaii to the cold waters off the coast of Japan, and back again. This migration is one of the most important aspects of the whales’ life cycle, allowing them to find food and reproduce in different habitats.

Balancing

Humpback whales are excellent divers and can stay underwater for up to 50 minutes at a time. This allows them to hunt for krill and fish, which are their primary food sources. They are also known for their acrobatic behavior, such as breaching and tail slapping.

orticel to transport food to the whales' blowholes so they can remain submerged for up to 50 minutes at a time. This allows them to hunt for krill and fish, which are their primary food sources. They are also known for their acrobatic behavior, such as breaching and tail slapping.

Humpback Whale Fun Facts

Once listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, the Hawaii humpback whale population has rebounded. Up to 12,000 humpback whales return to Hawaii’s waters every year. Known as koholā in Hawaiian, the scientific name is *Megaptera novaeangliae*. This species is the most acrobatic of whales, known for its leaps andBreathing

Humpback whales breathe through two blowholes (one on each side of their head). They can remain submerged for up to 50 minutes as they use their massive flippers to help them make the journey. The whales’ lungs contain around 200-300 gallons of air per breath, making their breathing process much more efficient than that of many other mammals.

Identifying Whales

The blowhole is one of the best ways to identify humpback whales, as each fin has a unique shape and color pattern. These patterns are used by researchers to track the whales’ movements and to identify individual whales.

Calves

Humpback whale calves are nursing-sized animals that are born in March or April. They can weigh up to 4,000 pounds at birth. Humpback whale calves are born near the mother’s side and are very playful. They are known as “nurseries” because they gather near these areas.

Post Natal Fin

At up to 15 feet long, humpback calves are the largest new-born animals in the world. The post-natal fin is a unique feature of these whales, which may help them navigate in the ocean.