

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary celebrates 30 years in November with Ho‘i Koholā, “welcome back whales” month

November marks Ho‘i Koholā, “welcome back whales” month. This November is also the 30th anniversary for [Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary](#).

Designated in November of 1992, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is one of the world’s most important whale habitats, and the only place in the United States where humpback whales mate, calve, and nurse their young.

November is the beginning of the 2022-2023 whale season at the sanctuary. Humpback whales are generally seen in Hawai‘i from November into May each year, with the peak season running from January through March.

“For thirty years, the sanctuary has worked with partners to protect our humpback whales, or nā koholā, through education, research, and entanglement response,” said Kim Hum, sanctuary superintendent. “We are excited to join the community in welcoming nā koholā back to the islands.”

A few early sightings of humpbacks have been reported in recent weeks. Greater numbers of whales are anticipated to return later this month. In preparation for the return of humpbacks to Hawai‘i, the sanctuary offers some reminders.

Go Slow: Whales Below

Mariners are asked to keep a lookout and practice whale etiquette when whales are present in Hawaiian waters from November through May. It is illegal to approach a humpback whale closer than 100 yards by any means by sea or drone and closer than 1,000 feet by aircraft.

Statistics show that collisions with whales are greatly reduced when boaters maintain a speed of 15 knots or less. So, during whale season, especially in water depths of 100 fathoms or less, it is recommended that boaters maintain a speed of 15 knots or less to reduce your risk of striking a whale.

Revised recommendations for best boating practices around whales were announced jointly by the sanctuary and the State of Hawai‘i and can be found at:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dobor/boating-with-whales/>

Additional wildlife viewing guidelines, safety tips, and hotlines can be found at

<https://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/visit/recreation.html>.

Reporting an issue

If you see an injured or entangled marine mammal, keep a safe and legal distance and call the statewide NOAA Marine Wildlife Hotline at 888-256-9840 or the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF channel 16 immediately. To report a vessel coming too close to a whale, call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964, email respectwildlife@noaa.gov, or contact

your local DOCARE office by phone, email, or on the DLNRTip app, which can be found at <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/blog/2020/07/09/nr20-097/>.



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Lyman/ Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (NOAA permit # 14682)



Whale breaching. Photo: Rachel Finn/NOAA permit #15240