

Abundance of Mother/Calf Whale Pairs in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Warrants Extra Care by Ocean Users

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary reports numerous mother/calf pairs in Hawai'i waters. Ocean users are reminded to reduce their speed and keep a safe and legal distance around whales.

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 Hawai'i waters each year to breed, give birth, and nurse their young.

Keep a safe distance

Collisions with vessels are a risk to whales and humans. 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.

Maintain a safe speed:

During whale season, especially in water depths of 100 fathoms/600 feet or less, boaters are asked to maintain a speed of 15 knots or less to minimize the risk of striking a whale. When directly approaching a whale to view it, or departing from viewing, speed should be reduced to six knots or less within 400 yards.

Revised recommendations for best boating practices around whales, developed jointly by the sanctuary, the State of Hawai'i, and Pacific Whale Foundation, can be found at:

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

If you see an entangled whale

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.

Anyone can report humpback whales entangled in marine debris. 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.

Reporting an issue

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/>.

“Ocean users play an important role by helping monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary and nearby waters,” said Ed Lyman, Natural Resource Specialist, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. “By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing

initial documentation and assessment of the animal---from a safe and legal distance---ocean users act like first responders and are the foundation of our conservation efforts."

Go slow, whales below

Additional wildlife viewing guidelines, safety tips, and hotlines can be found at <https://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/visit/recreation.html>. DLNR's Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation's "Boating with Whales website can be found at: <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dobor/boating-with-whales/>. In their blog, Pacific Whale Foundation explains the multi-organization workgroup that developed the boating speed recommendations: <https://www.pacificwhale.org/blog/go-slow-whales-below-pwf-research-instrumental-in-multi-agency-collaboration-resulting-in-new-voluntary-whale-watch-guidelines/>

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.

Designated in 1992, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary works to protect humpback whales and their habitat through research, education, conservation, and stewardship. The sanctuary is administered through a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources.