Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count Commence for 2024 Whale Season!

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Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count volunteers observe koholā, humpback whales from Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Molokaʻi, Hawaiʻi, Lānaʻi and Maui.

402 volunteers gathered data from the shores of Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Molokaʻi and Hawaiʻi islands during the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count and from Maui and Lānaʻi during the Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation, the first of three coordinated whale counts between the two organizations in 2024.

This is the sixth year that both counts are coordinated on the same days, ensuring the data from all the main Hawaiian Islands are collected simultaneously.

Volunteers collected data from 44 sites across all the main Hawaiian Islands on January 27. A total of 315 whales were observed during the 9:00 - 9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On the islands of Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Molokaʻi and Hawaiʻi, Ocean Count volunteers collected data from 32 sites; a total of 174 whales were observed during the 9:00 - 9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On Maui and Lānaʻi, Great Whale Count volunteers collected data from 12 sites during 15-minute intervals between 8:30 am and 11:50 am. A total of 141 whales were observed during the 9:00 - 9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count.

On Kauaʻi, the total number of whales observed during the day's count was 292, on Oʻahu, the total was 604, on Molokaʻi, the total was 30 and Hawaiʻi 324. The total number for the Great Whale Count on Maui was 821, and on Lānaʻi was 53, for a grand total of 2124 throughout the state. This number may represent duplicate sightings of the same whale by different observers or at different time periods or different locations throughout the day.

Data collected during the Sanctuary Ocean Count and Great Whale Count combined with other research efforts can help reveal trends in humpback whale occurrence within and amongst whale seasons.

Across the main Hawaiian Islands, weather conditions were primarily mostly sunny with winds varying from light to moderate throughout the day. Several sites did experience rain and gusty winds which was not ideal for observing whales. A variety of other species were also spotted during the count including honu (green sea turtles), ʻilioholoikauaua (Hawaiian monk seals), naiʻa (spinner dolphins), mālolo (Hawaiian flying fish) and multiple bird species such as aeʻo (Hawaiian stilts), ʻiwa (great frigatebird), mōlī (Laysan albatross), kōlea (Pacific golden plover), Nēnē (Hawaiian goose), and more.

Ocean Count promotes public awareness about humpback whales, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities. Site leaders tally humpback whale sightings and document the animals' surface behavior during the survey, which provides a snapshot of humpback whales' activity from the shorelines of Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Molokaʻi and Hawaiʻi islands. Ocean Count is supported by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

The Great Whale Count by Pacific Whale Foundation had site leaders count whales from shore as part of a long-term survey of humpback whales in Hawaiʻi, with 12 survey sites along the shoreline of Maui and a new site on the shoreline of Lānaʻi. This event provides a snapshot of trends in relative abundance of whales and is one of the world's longest-running community science projects.

Both counts take place three times during peak whale season annually on the last Saturday in January, February, and March.

Preliminary data detailing Sanctuary Ocean Count whale sightings by site location are available at: https://oceancount.org/resources/. Additional information is available on the sanctuary's website at http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov.

Pacific Whale Foundation's Great Whale Count data may be found at https://www.pacificwhale.org/research/community-science/ with additional information at www.mauiwhalefestival.org

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, administered by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawaiʻi Division of Aquatic Resources, protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve, and nurse their young.

With a mission to protect the ocean through science and advocacy, and to inspire environmental stewardship, Pacific Whale Foundation (PWF) conducts Research, Education and Conservation programs for the communities in which it serves. Founded by Greg Kaufman in 1980 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the world's whales from extinction, PWF now operates a social enterprise that offers fee-based programs and services through PacWhale Eco-Adventures to help fund its nonprofit work. Combined with memberships,

donations, charitable grants and a remarkable group of dedicated volunteers, PWF now reaches more than 400,000 individuals each year through its Maui and Australia offices and research projects in Ecuador and Chile.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Foundation directly supports national marine sanctuaries by protecting species, conserving ecosystems and preserving America's maritime heritage through on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs and scientific research and exploration.

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/

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