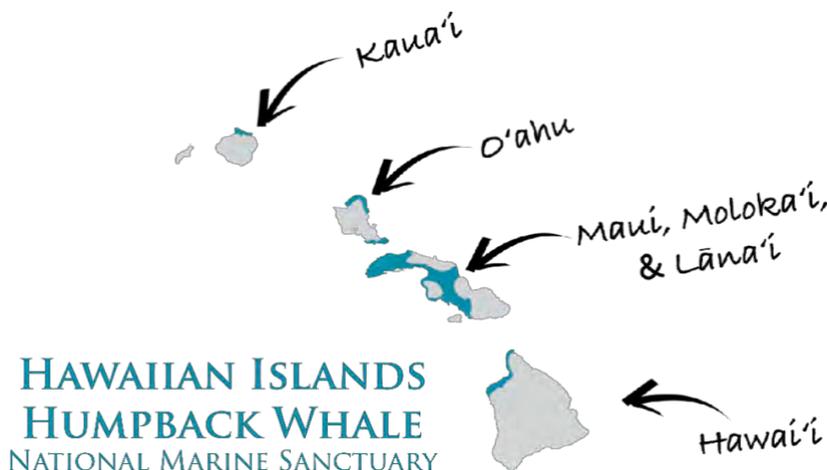


Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments Fiscal Year 2020

Every winter, thousands of humpback whales travel to the warm, shallow waters of Hawai'i to mate, give birth, and raise their young. Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1992 to protect and preserve these whales and their habitat. The sanctuary is protects waters found around the islands. These areas include Penguin Bank, the Maui Nui region (Maui, Lāna'i, Moloka'i, and Kaho'olawe), Kaua'i and Ni'ihau, Hawai'i Island, and O'ahu. Visit hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov for more information.



State partnership

NOAA and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, co-managers of the sanctuary, work together to accomplish many important priorities. NOAA and the state completed a new sanctuary management plan. As part of the sanctuary's resource protection program, the state and NOAA are collaborating on a project promoting the use of propeller guards to reduce whale injuries from boat strikes. The state also works closely with science staff on program and project development, and supports the whale entanglement response team. Together, they organized "Whale Day," an all-day marine education community event in Kīhei, attended by more than 6,000 people. The state of Hawai'i also supported the sanctuary in other ways, including purchasing new boat engines, printing educational posters, and purchasing all-weather outdoor educational signs.



Mother and calf humpback whale within sanctuary waters. Photo: Ed Lyman/NOAA permit #14682

Kaua'i Ocean Discovery grand opening

In partnership with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and the Kukui Grove Center, the sanctuary celebrated the grand opening of Kaua'i Ocean Discovery in Līhū'e in January. Free to the public, the Kaua'i Ocean Discovery shares the traditions and knowledge of our ocean connections and inspires stewardship of its visitors. The center is the first sanctuary learning center located in a shopping center and the first to be planned and designed in-house. Community appreciation and support for the new facility and its role as a catalyst for connections and collaboration have been extraordinary. More than 1,000 people attended the opening ceremony. In March, the Kaua'i Ocean Discovery was closed to the public until further notice in response to COVID-19.



Hula performance by Kanuikapono Public Charter School at the opening of the Kaua'i Ocean Discovery. Photo: James Yamamoto

New partnerships to expand whale tagging studies

During the 2020 field season, two new collaborative relationships were established. One with Marine Mammal Research Program of the University of Hawai'i, in which suction-cup video tags were deployed on humpback whale calves to study nursing behavior. The other was with Syracuse University to examine the development of singing behavior in juvenile male humpback whales through suction-cup acoustic tags. In total, 23 successful tag deployments on humpback whales were made during the field season between these two efforts. These new partnerships help establish the sanctuary as a leader in humpback whale tagging research.



Suction cup tag successfully attached to an adult humpback whale. These tags provide insights into the lives of whales.

Photo: Zang/NOAA permit #20043

Sanctuary coordinates a large whale response network

The sanctuary plays a leading role in the coordination of a community-based large whale entanglement response network around the main Hawaiian Islands to free whales from life-threatening entanglements. This past year, the sanctuary conducted more than 125 hours of large whale entanglement response training. Trainees included candidates from Hawai'i, Alaska, the U.S. West Coast, and Russia. The sanctuary worked with NOAA Fisheries and The Nature Conservancy to create a first-of-its-kind online course for large whale entanglement first response.



The sanctuary engages the on-water community by establishing a 1000-member citizen science effort to report, assess, and understand threats and impacts. Photo: NOAA

Looking Ahead

- The sanctuary will move a contract staff position to Kona to expand education and outreach programs throughout the West Hawai'i Island community. A sanctuary staff presence on the island will allow the sanctuary to embrace new partnerships and strengthen existing ones.
- The sanctuary will move forward with the 2021 Ocean Count, normally a program with more than 1,000 volunteers to support educational opportunities for the public to visit counting stations to learn about humpback whales and their habitat. New protocols and physical distancing procedures will be put in place to ensure the safety of all participants.
- The sanctuary named Patrick Ching as 2021-2022 Sanctuary Artist in Residence. The program recognizes a professional artist who will work with the sanctuary to help further their mission by donating their time, energy, and art expertise to help promote the sanctuary and its work

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. The network includes a system of 14 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.