

# NORTH PACIFIC HUMPBACK WHALE

## K o h o l ā

*Did you know...*

*...while in Hawaii, humpbacks all sing the same song, which changes over the season.*

*...the scientific name for humpbacks, *Megaptera novaengliae*, means "great wings of New England."*

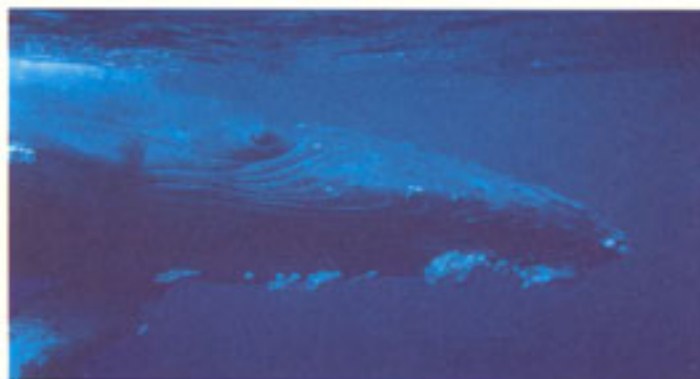


Photo courtesy Lori Mazzuca ©1997

### Population trends

North Pacific humpback whales are an endangered species. Scientists estimate that the pre-whaling population of North Pacific humpback whales was approximately 15,000 whales. Researchers estimate currently, the North Pacific humpback population numbers roughly 3,700 - 5,000 whales. It is believed that about two-thirds of this population (or roughly 2,500-3,000 whales) migrates to Hawaii each year.

### Distribution & Movement Patterns

North Pacific humpback whales winter in three nearshore lower latitude mating and calving areas: Hawaii, western Mexico, and the islands of southern Japan. During the spring and summer, North Pacific humpback whales migrate to feeding areas over the continental shelf of the Pacific rim, from the coast of California north to the Bering Sea. The main Hawaiian Islands may contain the largest seasonal population of North Pacific humpbacks in the world. Hawaii is the only state in the U.S. where humpbacks mate, calve, and nurse their young.

### Feeding patterns

Humpback whales feed during the summer, in northern waters (between approximate latitudes 40° to 75°). They feed on krill and small schooling fish, such as capelin and herring. Humpbacks rarely feed in their wintering areas; it is not known if they feed along their migratory routes.

*North Pacific humpback whales are an endangered species, protected by the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Hawaii state law.*

*In Hawaii, it is illegal to approach a humpback whale closer than 100 yards by sea, and 1,000 feet by air.*

*Report any suspected violations to the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964.*

## Reproduction

Mature females typically calve every 2-3 years. The humpback whale's gestation period is 10-12 months. Calves nurse for 10-12 months, often doubling in size during their first year. Humpback whales of both sexes typically reach sexual maturity between 5-9 years of age. The humpback whale's average lifespan is unknown, but is believed to be 40 - 60 years.

---

## Threats

Acoustic disturbance  
Collision with ships  
Entanglement in marine debris  
Habitat degradation, including pollution  
Illegal whaling

---

## Recovery efforts

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary seeks to educate the public about humpback whales and about the importance of Hawaii's waters to the humpbacks' survival. The Sanctuary also supports humpback whale research efforts in Hawaii.

---

## Research

Current research includes:  
population assessments;  
documenting and analyzing social and reproductive behavior; and,  
describing the natural history of humpback whales.

Research methods include:  
aerial and vessel surveys;  
underwater photography and acoustic recording;  
photo-identification of flukes; and,  
satellite tagging

*Sponsored by the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and the NOAA Fisheries Office of Enforcement*



**HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBACK WHALE  
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY**  
726 S. Kihel Road, Kihel, Maui, HI 96753  
1-800-831-4888  
<http://www.t-link.net/~whale/>

