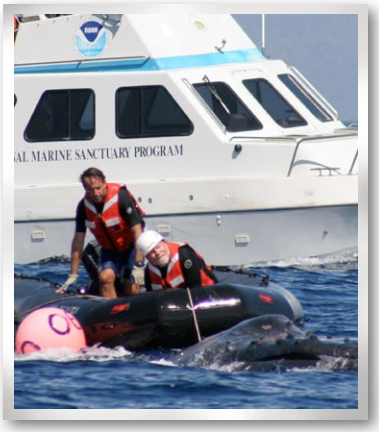
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale

2007 Accomplishments



Whale rescue experts prepare to cut ropes off an entangled humpback whale. Photo: NOAA #923-1489-08

Volunteers help staff members relocate a Hawaiian monk seal. Photo: NOAA

A sanctuary research team attemps to study the breath of a whale. Photo: NOAA

Sanctuary Personnel Continue Hawaiian Monk Seal Protection

Sanctuary staff play a key role as members of NOAA's Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network in actively protecting endangered Hawaiian monk seals on shorelines statewide Acting on a request by NOAA Fisheries and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, three seal pups were watched closely by staff and partners to protect them from human disturbances during their six-week nursing period. Numerous seals were roped off from beachgoers while coming ashore to rest. Hawaiian monk seals are a highly endangered species and the survival of the pups requires the highest level of protection.

Volunteers Promote Ocean Etiquette

Sanctuary volunteers have adopted Ahihi Bay, a very popular snorkeling site on the west side of Maui, to increase community understanding and stewardship of this natural reserve area. The bay is filled with tropical fish and turtles, and averages about 120 visitors a day. Sanctuary volunteers provide information to visitors at the bay about island ecology and marine life, including fact sheets that promote environmentally responsible behavior. Nationwide, volunteers play a key role in stewardship of our sanctuaries and help make our accomplishments possible.

Efforts Continue to Rescue Whales

Globally, whales entangled in fishing gear and marine debris is a pervasive problem. Along with ship strikes, entanglement is one of the largest causes of human-induced mortality of many large whales. Staff whale rescue experts and partners throughout the system continue to respond to whales in distress responding to 14 reports of entangled whales in Hawai'i and cutting free four of the six whales confirmed entangled. This season also marked the first time that satellite tags were used to track entangled whales in Hawaiian waters. Researchers are beginning to identify where the gear entangling the whales originates — in one case, rescuers found a whale ensnared in fishing gear from Alaska. Partner agencies in this effort are NOAA Fisheries, Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Scientists Develop New Research Techniques

During the 2007 humpback whale season, the sanctuary's research staff collaborated with several federal and academic institutions to use and develop new research techniques to study the overall health of humpback whales These techniques included assisting a Ph.D. student from the University of Hawai'i to investigate whale mating behavior and working with a chemist from the Oregon Health and Science University to study the breath of swimming humpback whales. If successful, the later technique could provide insights into the overall health and stress levels of individual whales.

http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov

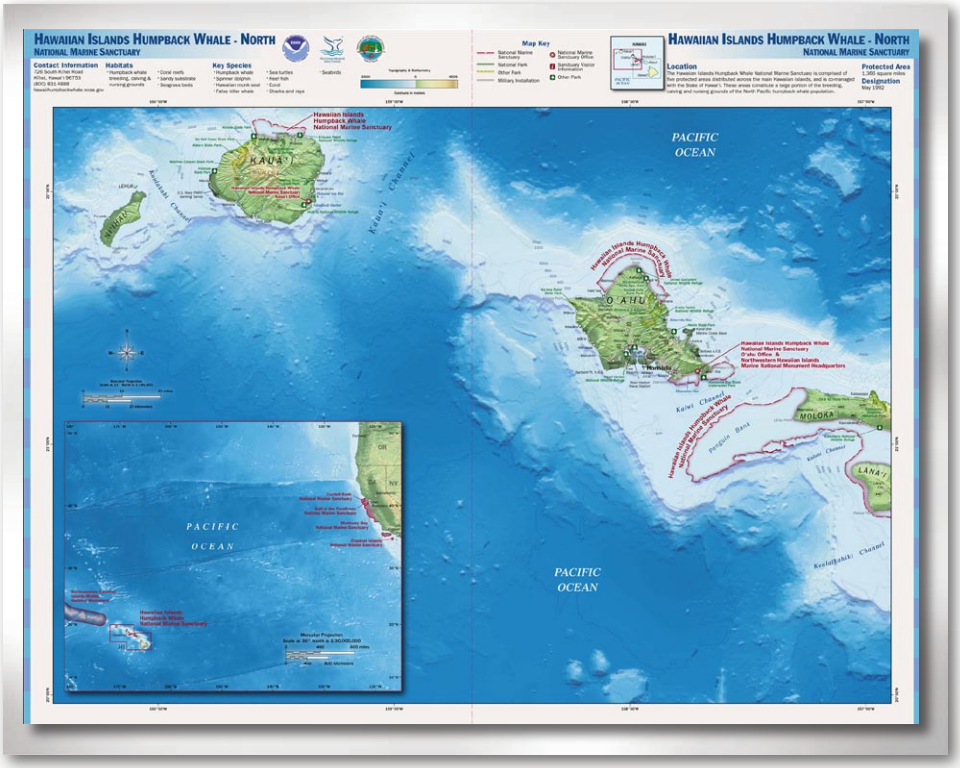
National Marine Sanctuaries

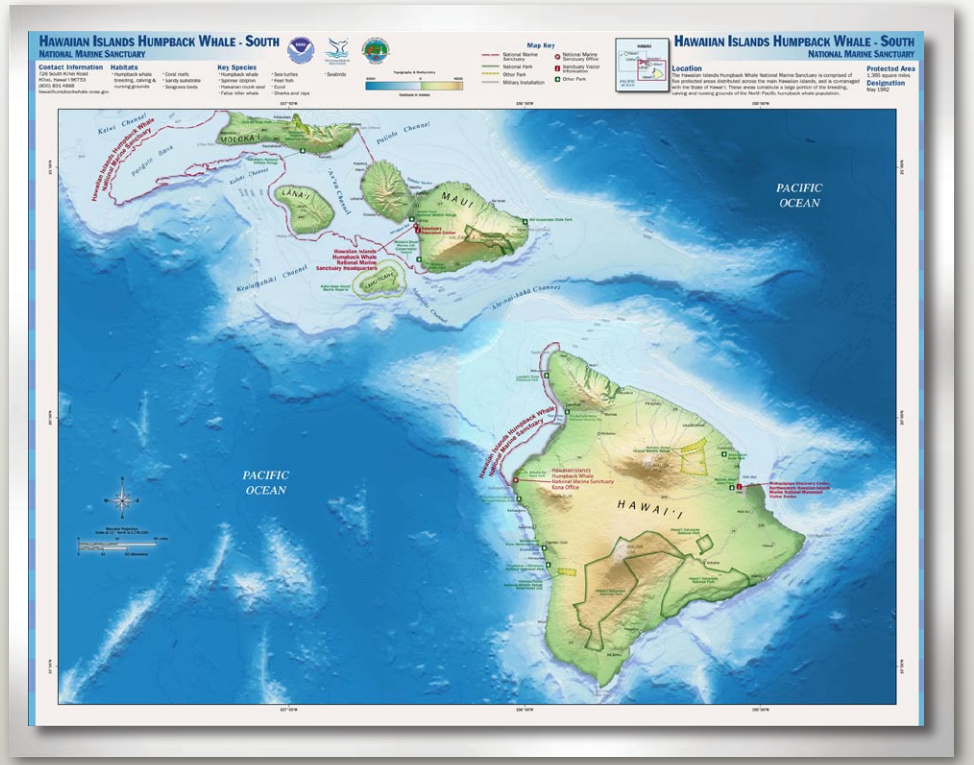
Volunteers Support Sanctuary Ocean Count Project

The annual sanctuary Ocean Count Project engages more than 2,000 volunteers every year. Once a month, from January through March, volunteers observe whales and record their behavior from over 65 shoreline locations. Girl Scouts earned a “Humpback Whale Badge” as they participated in the statewide count. This project has collected extensive whale population data and also serves as an important outreach tool that helps educate the public about NOAA and the sanctuary.

Staff and Partners Offer Marine Education Opportunities

The sanctuary is encouraging students and teachers to get wet and learn what it is like to be a marine biologist. Throughout the year, students at the Maui sanctuary site laid transects, collected data about the status of reef flats, and gathered water quality information. Others snorkeled to collect data for a multi-year project to monitor the changes in a native Hawaiian fishpond as it is being rebuilt. The fishpond fronts the Maui sanctuary site. The Maui education center hosted over 7,000 students this past year. Projects varied from one-time participation to schools that come on a weekly basis. Some students participated in rebuilding the fishing pond wall by using traditional methods and practicing cultural protocols, while others deployed cages and collected ongoing data about the growth rates of invasive and native seaweeds. The sanctuary is working with partner organizations to build its capacity to support similar educational opportunities on all islands.





Sanctuary maps available at sanctuaries.noaa.gov

To learn more about these and other accomplishments,
visit sanctuaries.noaa.gov