

Aloha Great Whale Count Community Scientists,

Thank you for volunteering to help with Pacific Whale Foundation's Great Whale Count! The Great Whale Count is a systematic count of humpback whales seen in the nearshore waters of Maui Nui. By simultaneously counting whale sightings at various locations around the islands, we can estimate the total number of whales present, and compare this number to previous years' results.

Due to COVID-19, the safety precautions necessary for social distancing and the continuation of our long-term community based data collection, the 2021 Great Whale Count will be modified. Community scientists are able to contribute to the event by counting and recording whale sightings from shore based locations. Please **do not** go to one of the 12 Great Whale Count sites, but instead choose an alternative location.

2021 Pandemic Policies:

- Each community scientist is required to fill out a Pacific Whale Foundation **Volunteer Waiver** in order to participate. Please send it to caitlinmiller@pacificwhale.org before January 30th.
- It is important that all volunteers follow all local state and federal guidelines during the event.
- Please observe social distancing regulations and only count with members of your immediate household.
- Masks are required during the event.

This year's Great Whale Count will take place on three separate dates:

Saturday, January 30

Saturday, February 27

Saturday, March 27

Please arrive at your site in order to allow plenty of time to park, walk to the designated location, and be ready to begin. Survey efforts (actual counting) will begin at **8:30am sharp**.

What you will need at your site:

- Personal effects: Water, sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, chair, camera, snacks, etc.
- Binoculars (optional but recommended)
- Rain jacket is sometimes necessary, please check the weather ahead of time
- Clipboard for recording on the Summary Datasheet *optional

Project Background

Every year, approximately 11,000 North Pacific humpback whales migrate to the Hawaiian Islands to engage in breeding activities. The Great Whale Count is an opportunity for members of the public to observe whales from shore and contribute to community science with Pacific Whale Foundation. The first Great Whale Count was conducted on Maui in 1995, providing us with over 20 years of community science data from this survey.

Although the count is **not** meant to provide a rigorously accurate census of the entire population, it provides a time-controlled snapshot of the number of whales visible in a small section of the nearshore waters of Maui Nui. This snapshot enables researchers to supplement scientific information and begin to assess long-term population trends and near-shore habitat use of humpback whales.



Your task is: To scan the ocean for humpback whales within 3 miles of shore and record data/tally on the provided data sheet. Please read the instructions below for specific information regarding the scanning procedure and expectations. You will benefit from having a pair of binoculars to see the number of whales, but it is not necessary or required for this event. We strongly recommend that you scan the area with your naked eye to reduce eye strain and only use binoculars to confirm details of any sighted pods. Good eyesight is important, and if you think your vision is not strong enough, it might be best if you withdraw from this event, as it will affect the number of whales counted and bias the results. Please make sure you write small enough on your Summary Datasheet so you have space for the entire time frame.

Scanning for whales:

When looking for whales, Scan back and forth continuously **with naked eye** (think of windshield wipers) and investigate with binoculars if needed.

Cues to look for when spotting whales: Blows, backs, flukes, big splashes, etc.



Estimating Distance:

We want to count all whales within 3 miles of shore. If your site is at sea level, count all whales that you can see. The horizon is ~ 3 miles distance.

During the given time frames on the **Summary Datasheet** you will **tally** the following information for each whale sighting:

- **Total # of pods:** tally each pod you see. A pod may consist of one whale or a group of whales together
- **Total # of UNIQUE Whales:** Estimate and tally the number of whales (including calves) in each pod based on the number you see (this is where binoculars are useful). It is usually better to underestimate than overestimate.
- **Total # of UNIQUE Calves:** Calves are animals that are half the size of an adult. If there are calves in the pod, tally to indicate how many.

If a whale is sighted during the first time frame, and is still present during the second time frame, do we record it again?

Yes, each scan stands on its own. However, do not record the same pod *within the same time frame*. It is helpful to remember the direction of travel for pods, so you do not double count.

After completing the count for the very last time frame, please total up each column and add any notes on interesting observations.

Please email a clear image of the **Summary Datasheet** page to research@pacificwhale.org.
If you have any questions please contact **Caitlin Miller** at Pacific Whale Foundation 808-727-9514, caitlinmiller@pacificwhale.org,

Thank you all for making this event possible.

Mahalo,

PWF Research Team

