

# HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBAC WHALE 2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

## SPLASH Research Phase Complete

The largest international humpback whale study ever attempted completed its final year of field study. Known as the Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance and Status of Humpbacks study (SPLASH), the cooperative effort looked at the population structure of humpback whales across the entire North Pacific. In Hawai`i, the project's last winter of field work was a record-breaker. More than 2,500 groups of whales were encountered, and researchers collected 32,170 tail photos resulting in the identification of 2,200 individual humpback whales, almost twice the number identified in the first year of SPLASH. While the bulk of the analysis is not yet complete, preliminary results predict that enough data was collected to assess the status, trends and potential human impacts to the whales.



Charts of tail photos help researchers identify individual whales. Photo: NOAA Fisheries permit # 782-1719

## New Methods to Reduce Whale Strikes

Vessel collisions with whales are one of the largest threats to humpbacks. In an effort to reduce ship strikes to the animals, sanctuary staff enhanced its ocean-user outreach efforts with several approaches. Staff installed 11 safety signs at small boat harbors and ramps across the state. In addition, staff distributed wildlife viewing information to the ocean-user industry during Humpback Whale Awareness Month. These efforts were aimed at facilitating safe boating and responsible wildlife viewing in the sanctuary with the primary objective of protecting humpback whales.



Team of rescuers work to untangle a humpback whale. Photo: NOAA MMHSRP # 932-1489-08

## Sanctuary Ocean Count Project A Success

More than 1,900 volunteers participated in last year's Ocean Count project where volunteers watch whales and record their behaviors from over sixty-five shoreline locations. This popular outreach effort continues to grow each year and has become a favorite project of many Hawai`i residents and tourists. Aside from the data that is collected, the project is effective in increasing public awareness, understanding, and appreciation for humpback whales, and Hawai`i's precious marine environment.



A breaching humpback whale. Photo: Doug Perrine, NOAA Permit # 88

## Staff Continue Marine Mammal Protection Efforts

The sanctuary supported marine mammal conservation throughout the state of Hawai`i by assisting with emergency responses. Working with NOAA's Fisheries Service and the Hawai`i Department of Land and Natural Resources, the sanctuary staff played a key role in protecting Hawai`i's marine mammals. Staff protected three Hawaiian monk seals, the most endangered seals in the United States, from human disturbance during their six-week nursing periods, and removed fishing hooks from seven Hawaiian monk seals around the state. Sanctuary staff also responded to several stranded cetaceans, providing logistical support to ensure that the animals received proper care. These coordinated efforts have helped to ensure the future protection of Hawai`i's marine protected species.

To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov)

## Education Cruise Helps Prepare Tomorrow's Ocean Stewards

The NOAA ship, *Hi'ialakai* has become an annual platform for high school marine education cruises. A select number of students and teachers from all the islands have had the opportunity to participate in oceanography and other lessons while sailing aboard the ship. Lessons highlight the actual science that is performed on the ship by NOAA scientists. Participants are given a unique opportunity to consider ocean-related careers while experiencing hands-on science at sea. The students that are taught today may be the NOAA scientists of tomorrow.



The NOAA ship, *Hi'ialakai* supports research in Hawaiian Islands. *Photo: NOAA*

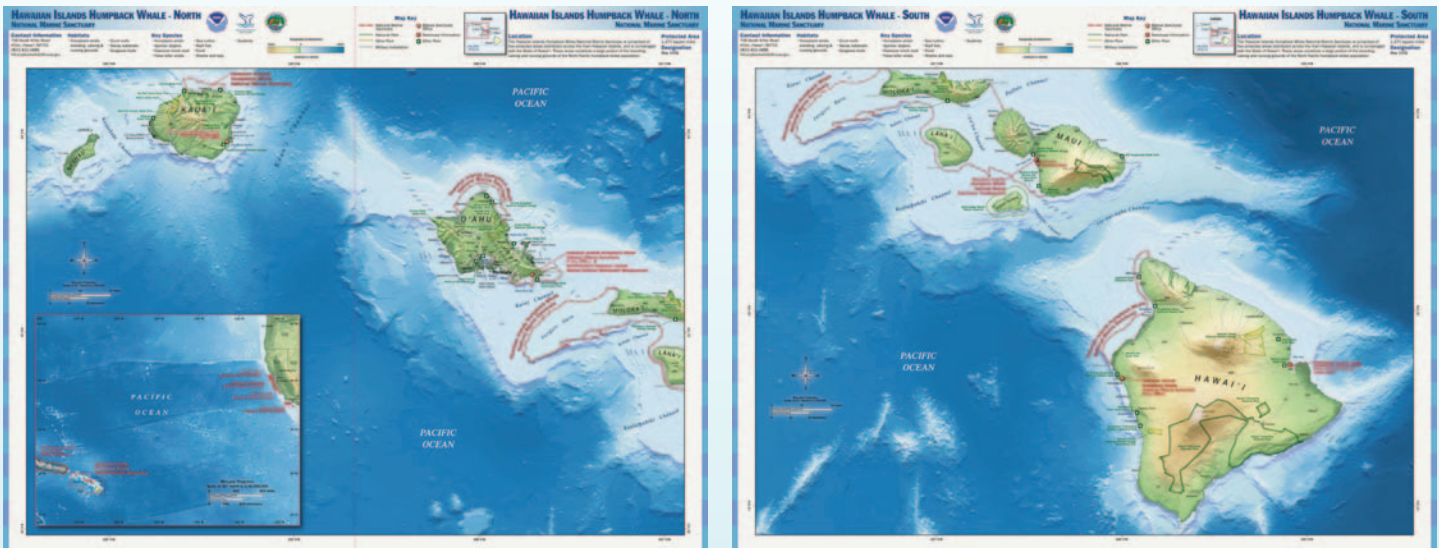
## Marine Science Curriculum Underway for Hawai`i

Sanctuary and state educators are developing K-12 marine science curriculum for the State of Hawai`i Department of Education. The completed curriculum will include integrated standards-based lessons, multi-media packages, accompanying field trips and in-the-field monitoring activities, focusing on ocean literacy and NOAA-related science. The marine education program will provide students with the fundamental knowledge they need to understand and protect Hawai`i's most precious resource - the ocean.

### Plans for 2007

- The sanctuary's new visitor and education center is due to open in 2007. The center will complement the existing "landmark" blue office building and mural painted education center in Kihei, Maui. The new center will provide an expanded facility for research and education programs that will enhance humpback whale protection in Hawai`i.

## Sanctuary Maps Now Available



New sanctuary atlas maps depicting physical ocean and land features, other state and federal managed areas and parks, and other basic atlas features are now available on the sanctuary program Web site: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov).

**To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov)**

