

International Programs

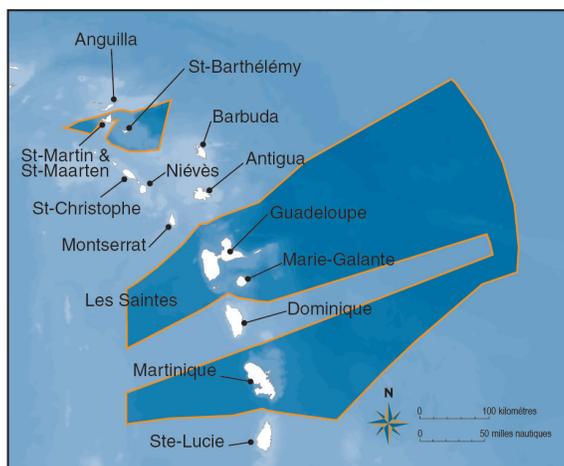
Sister Sanctuary Agreement Established in French Antilles

In 2011, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and France's Marine Protected Areas Agency signed a Sister Sanctuary agreement to protect endangered humpback whales that migrate annually between NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and the Agoa Marine Mammal Sanctuary in the French Antilles. This area includes the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Martin and St. Barthelemy at the Caribbean's eastern edge. The agreement has since been renewed through 2020.

Both sanctuaries provide critical support for the North Atlantic population of humpback whales, which spend spring and summer at Stellwagen Bank sanctuary and other northern feeding grounds before heading south to the warmer waters of the Caribbean Sea in late fall to mate and give birth to their young.

The Agoa Marine Mammal Sanctuary was declared in September 2010, in recognition of the vast diversity of marine mammal species present in the French Antilles and the Caribbean in general, and of the potential threats facing these marine mammals and their habitats. Agoa's entire 143,256 square-kilometer French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is currently defined as a critical habitat for marine mammals. In all, 25 of the 28 cetacean species that can be found in the Caribbean Sea, including baleen whales and toothed whales, have been documented in the French Antilles.

Agoa was created consistent with the objectives of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean (the Cartagena Convention) and its Protocol on Specially Protected Areas for Wildlife (SPAW), and SPAW's Marine Mammal Action Plan for the Wider Caribbean. The Agoa MPA was listed as a special SPAW area in 2012.



The sanctuary's name, Agoa, refers to the goddess of the sea in Amerindian mythology.

The objective of the sanctuary is to ensure the conservation of marine mammals, within the framework of a harmonious co-existence with human activities. Today hunting is no longer practiced in French waters, but other threats include an increase in maritime traffic, noise pollution, pollution and degradation of marine environment habitats, and an increase in whale watching, which may contribute to behavioral disturbance. Within Agoa, provisions are being made to remove or reduce the negative effects of the activities having an impact on the well being of marine mammals or the integrity of their population.

Under the auspices of UNEP's SPAW Protocol, the sister sanctuary agreement helps improve humpback whale recovery in the North Atlantic by providing new avenues for collaborative education, scientific and management efforts, including joint research and monitoring programs.

Region, which recognizes the importance of protecting critical humpback whale habitats and migratory corridors.

The North Atlantic Humpback Whale Sister Sanctuary Program (NAHW-SSP) helps improve knowledge about humpbacks in the Atlantic and the threats they face from both natural and man-made changes to their environment. The NAHW-SSP is crucial to the long-term conservation of the endangered North Atlantic humpback whale population, as well as to the development of future cooperative agreements with other countries.

Footprints



*"Footprints" photographed in US/ SBNMS in 2008.
Credit: Center for Coastal Studies*

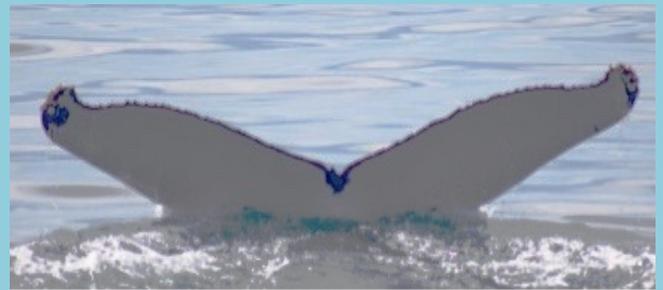
When a humpback whale named "Footprints" was photographed in 2008 in the Gulf of Maine's northern feeding ground, and in 2011 in the southern breeding/calving ground off Guadeloupe, it was the first fluke photo match confirming the migration exchange between Agoa and Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.

After decades observing whales in the Gulf of Maine, the northwestern Atlantic and the Caribbean, scientists have been able to identify a number of individual humpback whales as they migrate north and south. But whales visiting the eastern Caribbean remain somewhat of a mystery.

The photo match for "Footprints" was the first successful pairing of images under a new international citizen science humpback whale tracking and identification project called CARIB Tails, launched by Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and its sister sanctuary partners. Sailors and yachters are the key contributors, especially in the remote and under-surveyed areas of the Eastern Caribbean.

In coordination with the United Nations' Caribbean Environment Programme's SPAW Protocol and its Regional Activity Centre (Guadeloupe), the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Sister Sanctuary Program and its network of marine mammal sanctuaries (MaMPAN), supports the protection of the North Atlantic population of humpback whales in the U.S., the French Antilles, Bermuda, the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean Netherlands.

For more information: www.caribtails.org



*Footprints re-sighted in Agoa, Guadeloupe in 2011.
Credit: Association Evasion Tropicale.*

Photo-Identification

Humpback whales have patterns of black and white pigmentation and scars on the underside of their tails that are unique to each whale, just as fingerprints are to humans.

For scientific purposes, humpback whales sighted in the North Atlantic are assigned a catalog number in the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalog (NAHWC) maintained by the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine U.S.A. The NAHWC is one of the longest and most detailed data sets for baleen whales in the world.

Photographs in the catalog (n=9,000), including date and location, allow scientists and naturalists to identify and monitor individual animals and gather valuable information about migration patterns, population sizes, health, sexual maturity and behavior patterns.