

CARIB TAILS

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An International Citizen Science Project for Yachters

CARIB TAILS is enlisting yachters as citizen scientists to help track the movements of humpback whales between their North Atlantic feeding grounds and their breeding grounds in the Wider Caribbean Region. Using photo-identification techniques to help monitor the recovery of this endangered species, the project is an international research collaboration between Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and its Sister Sanctuary Program partners, together with UNEP's Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Programme.

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (within the Gulf of Maine) protects a shared population of approximately 1,000 humpback whales that return from their breeding grounds with new calves each spring. Currently, there is limited information about specific breeding areas for this population in the Wider Caribbean Region, especially the Eastern Caribbean.



Credit: D. Cholewiak

A Sanctuary Concern

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, located within the Gulf of Maine, is a regular summer feeding site for some of the humpback whales that winter in the Caribbean. Wintering areas in the Northern Caribbean have been well studied and have formed the basis for a Sister Sanctuary in the waters off the Dominican Republic. However there is still limited information about specific or preferred breeding areas for this population in the Eastern Caribbean. Contributions of tail fluke photographs from the Caribbean region are critical for conservation efforts.



Whales (left to right): Tofu, Burst, Seal, Loon and Chodhu. Whale tail photographs courtesy of Whale and Dolphin Conservation.

Flukeprints: "Fingerprints" of Whale Identification

Individual humpback whales are identified by the black and white patterns on the underside of their (tail) flukes. When humpbacks dive, they often raise their flukes above the water's surface and provide researchers the opportunity to photograph the natural markings on the underside. Photo-identification has allowed researchers to monitor the movements, health and behavior of individual humpbacks since this research began in the 1970's.

INVEST in PROTECTING HUMPBACK WHALES — GET INVOLVED: For more information about how to participate in CARIB TAILS, and requirements for submitting your images, please visit the website www.caribtails.org

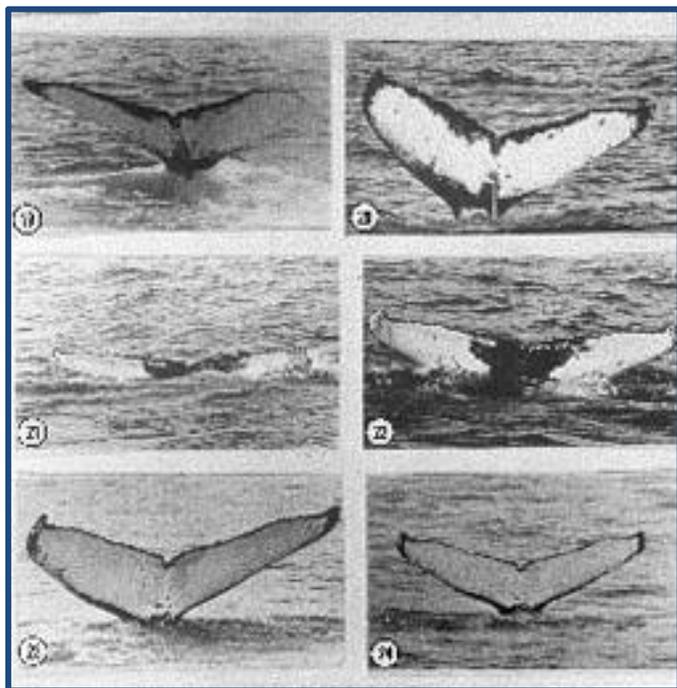
HUMPBACK IDENTIFICATION

CARIB HUMPBACK TAIL FLUKES photographs are added to the **North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalogue**, which has been maintained since 1976 by **Allied Whale** at the College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine USA.. Currently the catalogue contains fluke photographs of more than 7,000 individual humpback whales. It is the result of collaboration between scientists, naturalists, citizen scientists and tourists who have contributed photographs of humpbacks from regions including North America, Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Caribbean.

By cataloguing individual humpback whales, scientists can monitor individual animals and gather valuable information about population sizes and migration patterns. Information gained from the Catalogue helps advance understanding of marine mammal conservation and habitat protection, raise public awareness, and motivate positive marine mammal conservation

When new photographs of humpback tail flukes are received, they are matched against the photographs in the existing North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalogue. Information about each whale sighting (such as date, time, location) is kept in a database.

Using these kinds of data, it has been possible to learn that humpbacks mature no earlier than four years of age, may have calves every two years, travel to the Caribbean in winter to mate and give birth, and appear to return to the same northern feeding area each summer.



In this example from the Catalogue, new photographs (right column) are carefully compared and matched to existing photographs (left column).

All photos taken under NOAA Fisheries research permits or Northeast Region whale watching guidelines.



“SALT” Matriarch of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Humpbacks

"Salt," the first humpback whale to be given a name, is known as the matriarch of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary because she has been seen there in all but one summer since 1976. She was also the first humpback whale to be identified by researchers on Silver Bank off the Dominican Republic.

Those photos helped scientists confirm the migratory connections that links northern feeding grounds with southern breeding grounds. Salt is a grandmother, and over the past 30 years she has escorted 12 known calves, the last born in 2010, from the Caribbean back to Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.