

North Atlantic Humpback Whale Sister Sanctuary Program

Sister Sanctuaries Work to Protect Endangered Whales

North Atlantic Humpbacks Find Havens Throughout Migratory Range

For the first time, a group of nations have joined forces to protect an endangered migratory marine mammal on both ends of its range—the endangered humpback whale.

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS)

was designated by Congress in 1992, and in 2006 signed an international sister sanctuary agreement to work together with the Santuario de Mamíferos Marinos de la República Dominicana (Marine Mammal Sanctuary of the Dominican Republic) to protect this charismatic species. In 2011, Stellwagen Bank NMS signed a similar sister sanctuary agreement with the French Antilles Agoa Marine Mammal Sanctuary, and in 2012 signed a sister sanctuary agreement with the government of Bermuda to help protect the humpback whales along their migration corridors. A sister sanctuary agreement with Yarari, the Caribbean Netherlands NMS is anticipated in 2016. *These agreements have helped create the first international marine mammal protected area network (MMPAN) to protect humpback whales in the world.*

"SALT" —The Grande Dame of the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Sister Sanctuary Program (NAHW-SSP)

When a humpback named "Salt" was photographed in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary in 1976, and also photographed on Silver Bank off the Dominican Republic in 1979, it confirmed a migration path between SBNMS and the Caribbean.



Salt's Flukes (Source: CCS)

International scientific studies in 1992 and 2004 confirmed that humpback whales throughout the North Atlantic are generally loyal to their northern feeding grounds, and return each winter to mix with other groups in warm Caribbean waters to breed and calve. Long term research has shown that a population of approximately 1,000 individuals make the 3,000 mile round trip between SBNMS and the Caribbean each year.



Map shows nations that have joined together to protect endangered humpback whales. Sister sanctuary agreements help increase public awareness and encourage cooperative research and conservation programs.

Protection Beyond Borders

The Sister Sanctuary Program is working toward increasing public awareness and support for marine mammal conservation through joint research, monitoring, education and capacity-building programs designed to enhance coordination and help improve endangered humpback whale recovery in the North Atlantic.

The sister sanctuary model promotes a strategy that defines emerging problems beyond Exclusive Economic Zones, kindles commitment to critical habitats, and manifests the true spirit of regional cooperation, which is a key element to ensure effective management for biodiversity protection and the conservation of migratory, marine mammal species.

The sister sanctuary concept is part of a larger international global vision of Marine Mammal Protected Areas worldwide. The United Nations Environment Programme has cited the sister sanctuary agreement as an important mechanism to maintain connections between marine protected areas and to protect migratory endangered species that cross international boundaries.