

Marine Mammals



Other baleen whales

Balaenoptera acutorostrata (LC)

Balaenoptera borealis (FE, EN)

Balaenoptera edeni (DD)

Balaenoptera musculus (FE, EN)

Balaenoptera physalus (FE, SE, EN)

Eubalaena japonica (FE, EN)

SPECIES STATUS:

Four Federally Listed Endangered (FE)

One State Listed as Endangered (SE)

IUCN Red List - Various (see abbreviations below)

IUCN Data Deficient (DD)

IUCN Endangered (EN)

IUCN Least Concern (LC)

SPECIES INFORMATION: Baleen whales are filter feeders and the largest whales found in Hawai'i. The whales discussed here are the minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), sei whale (*B. borealis*), Bryde's whale (*B. edeni*), blue whale (*B. musculus*), fin whale (*B. physalus*), and North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). Minke, Bryde's, blue, and fin whales, known as "gulpers," feed in separate events, often lunging at large schools of fish. North Pacific right whales are known as "skimmers," constantly taking in water as they move and filtering out their food. Minke, Bryde's, and fin whales feed on large schools of fish and krill, whereas blue whales and North Pacific right whales feed exclusively on plankton. Sei whales use both skimming and gulping to feed on small fish, krill, squid, and copepods. Baleen whales give birth in winter, with calving intervals of two to three years. Females may mate with more than one male in a season. Gestation periods are 10 to 12 months, and calves wean at six to eight months. Baleen whales usually occur alone or in small groups, although they may congregate in larger groups to feed.

DISTRIBUTION: Bryde's whale is the only baleen whale in Hawai'i that is non-migratory and they are most often sighted northwest of the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). The others feed at higher latitudes and migrate to Hawai'i seasonally.

BUNDANCE: Abundance estimates in the Hawaiian Islands Exclusive Economic Zone are as follows: sei whale 178, Bryde's whale 633, fin whale 58, and blue whale 81. There are no estimates for minke or North Pacific right whale, and their presence in Hawaiian waters is rare and/or seasonal.

LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: Minke, fin, and North Pacific right whales primarily inhabit coastal and shelf waters, but also can be found in offshore waters. Sei, Bryde's, and blue whales generally occur in coastal, shelf, and oceanic waters.

THREATS:

- Whaling. Population declines due to whaling occurred worldwide, although international limits on commercial whaling have greatly reduced this threat.
- Boat strikes and entanglement. Ships colliding with baleen whales and entanglement in fishing gear are significant causes of injury and mortality.
- Marine pollution and debris. Ingestion of marine debris can cause intestinal injury or blockage. Accumulations of tiny, plastic particles containing PCBs and DDEs can cause toxic effects when ingested; this may be particularly dangerous for baleen whales because they take in large quantities of water at a time during feeding.
- Underwater noise. Sonar transmissions from military vessels, underwater detonations during military exercises, and vessel noise may interfere with behavior, and result in physical harm or loss of hearing sensitivity.

- **CONSERVATION ACTIONS:** Actions specific to baleen whales should include the following:
 - Continue to reduce vessel strikes and entanglement.
 - Reduce marine debris and pollutants in the marine environment.
 - Collaborate with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on enforcement of the Marine Mammal Protection Act to prevent marine mammal harassment and disturbance.
 - Incorporate baleen whales and other marine mammals in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary management.

MONITORING:

- Monitor abundance and distribution of baleen whales in Hawaiian waters.
- Monitor mortality and injury from entanglement and boat strikes.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Reevaluate impacts of plastics and marine debris on baleen whales.
- Examine impacts of underwater noise and sonar transmissions on baleen whales.

References:

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