



The Pitcairn Islands Whale Watching Code of Conduct



Marine
Management
Organisation



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Humpback whales in the Pitcairn Islands

Humpback whales frequent our shores from May to October. They are particularly vulnerable in our waters as they arrive after a long migration to reproduce and give birth.

They are also part of a sub-population which is considered to be endangered.

Seeing whales in their natural environment is a wonderful experience, however we sometimes forget that our presence has an impact on them and their habitat. Like us, whales need space to choose mates, socialise and rest.

Mothers choose our tranquil waters to guarantee their calves the best conditions to be born and grow quickly. When we get too close, approach too fast or make too much noise, we may disrupt these activities and cause the animals' unnecessary stress.

This can lead to a reduction in the number of whales and they may eventually leave the area altogether.

Please help us to protect these animals by being respectful and following these guidelines

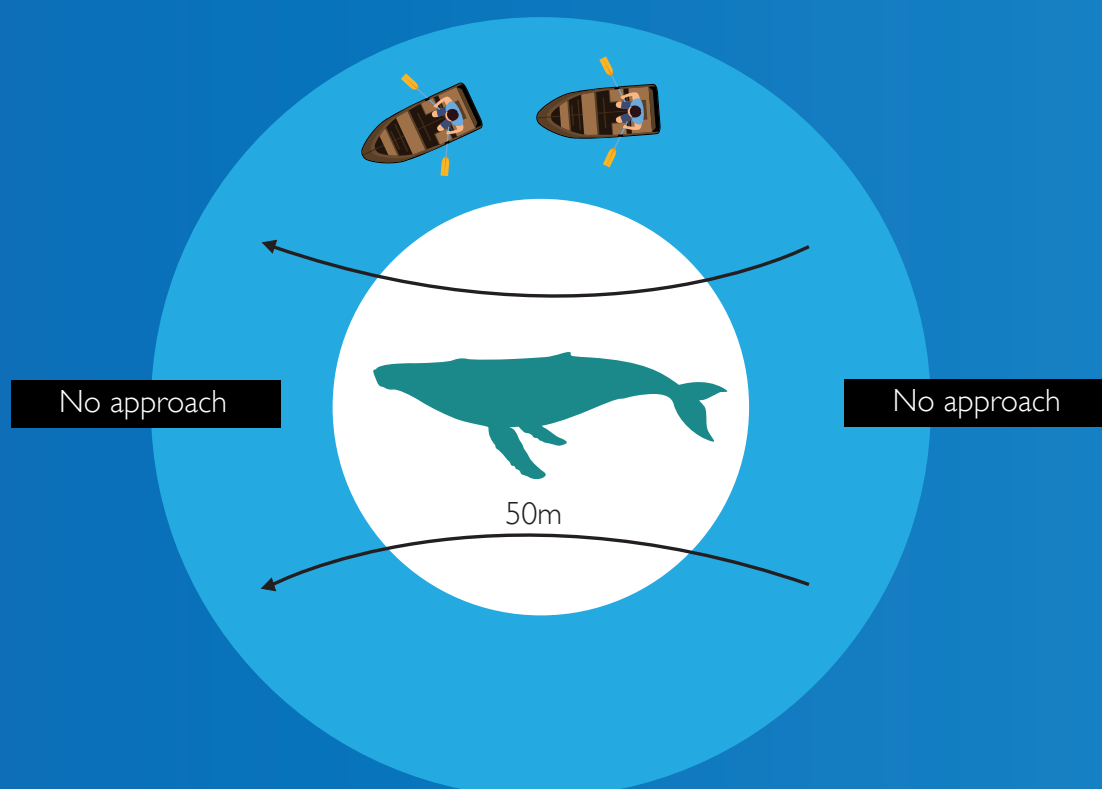


General:

- Any vessels offering trips to watch whales must be operated by a local from the Pitcairn Islands.
- All operators offering trips to watch whales should have received training in order to gain a sound knowledge of whale behaviour and how to operate a vessel when watching whales in order to minimise disturbance.
- Prior to the trip commencing, the operator of any vessel offering trips to watch whales should brief all passengers on the general behaviours expected and the actions they should all take to reduce disturbance to the animals (e.g. not making loud noises, not dropping litter etc.)
- Any scientific studies of the whales (including activities which may not comply with this code of conduct) require a permit from the Environmental, Conservation and Natural Resources Division and applicants must provide proof of animal welfare and health and safety assessments from their respective institute.

Approaching whales in a vessel:

- Approach areas of known or suspected whale activity with extreme caution. Look in all directions before planning your approach or departure.
- When whales have been spotted, approach them slowly and cautiously from the side and never from the front or directly from behind.
- If animals are moving in a consistent direction, maintain a steady parallel course at a speed no greater than 5 knots or no greater than the slowest animal. Minimise abrupt changes in direction, speed, gear or engine noise so that the animals are not startled or confused.
- Do not approach nearer than 50m of a whale (100m if a mother and calf are observed) - being so close can disturb whales and may be dangerous
- If any whales approach within 50m of your vessel, slow down gradually and put the engine in neutral until the animals are observed at the surface, clear of the vessel.



Observations from a boat:

- Do not drop or lower an anchor from your vessel within 300m of a whale.
- Leave the boat engine running, in neutral when watching whales - this avoids the risk of injury to the animal or of damage to the vessel by a frightened whale.
- Groups containing calves are particularly vulnerable to disturbance; exercise extreme caution with groups containing calves and never allow a boat to come between a mother and a calf - disruption of parental care may reduce a calf's chance of survival and mothers may be aggressive.
- Do not intentionally chase, encircle, block the direction of travel of whales or disperse or separate a group of whales.
- No more than 2 vessels should observe a whale or group of whales at any one time; the vessels should keep to the side of the group of cetaceans and not encircle the animals – too many boats can confuse whales.
- Vessels should not spend more than 30 minutes observing a whale or group of whales.
- Do not make any loud or sudden noises which may disturb the animals.
- Do not try to touch the whales – this places boats into close contact with whales increasing the risk of collision and propeller damage; whales are also wild animals and there is a risk of injury to people from close contact as well as the spread of disease.
- If at any time during the interaction, whales show signs of distress then the boat should move away to at least 300m from the animals at a slow speed of less than 5 knots - signs of distress include abrupt changes in speed or direction, changes in diving behaviour and changes in breathing patterns.





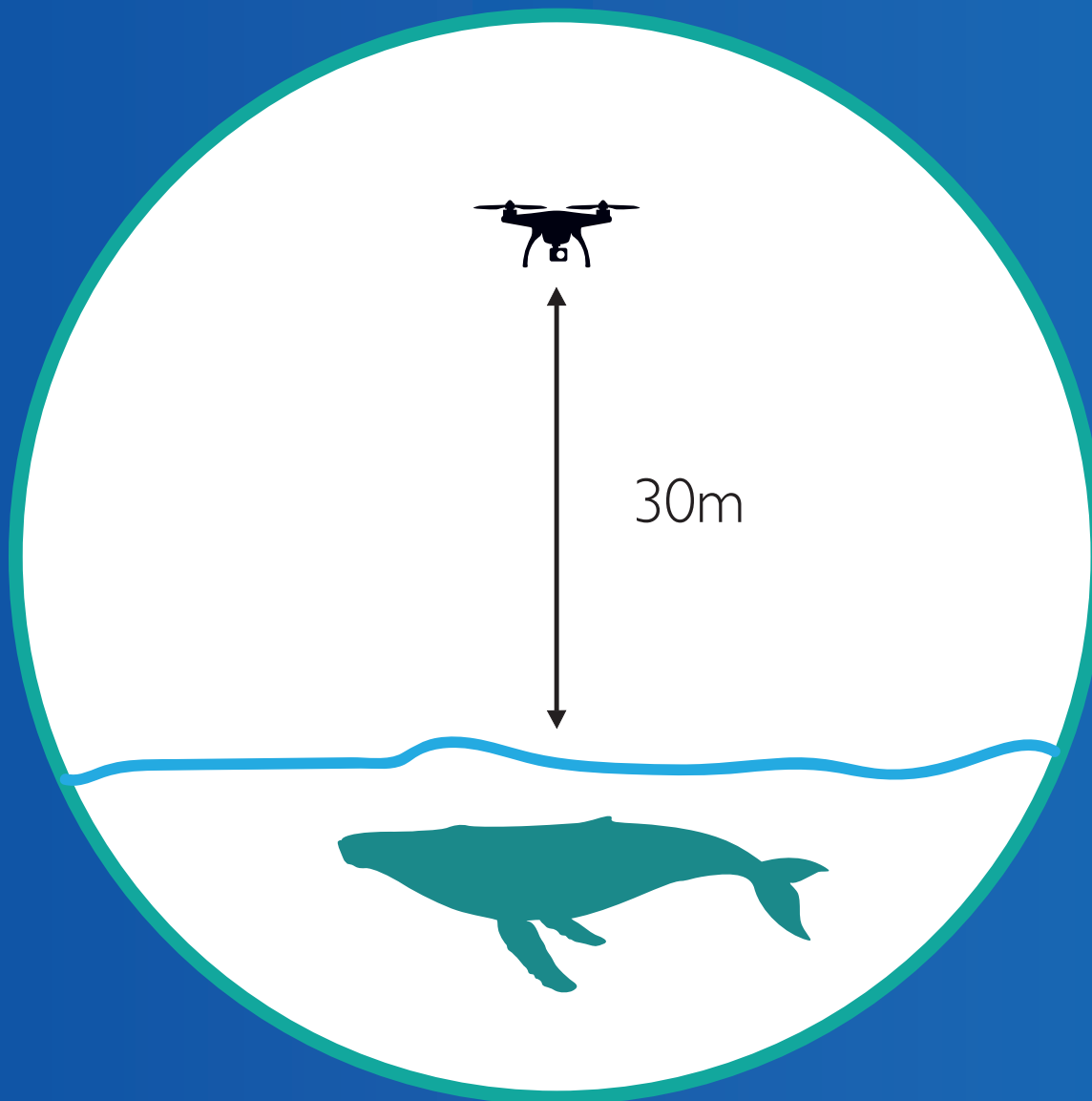
In-water observations:

- No intentional swimming or snorkelling with whales except by locals from the Pitcairn Islands.
- If a whale approaches you whilst swimming, snorkelling or diving, do not make any rapid movements and move away slowly to avoid startling it; do not try to touch it or swim towards it.
- Locals who are swimming/snorkelling should not approach closer than 30m to a whale and underwater flash photography or lighted filming should not be used



Observations from the air:

- Locals who are swimming/snorkelling should not approach closer than 30m to a whale and under water flash photography or lighted filming should not be used
- Drones should be used with caution: the drone should be kept in sight at all times and should not be flown at an altitude of less than 30m. Animal responses should be monitored during drone operations (and before and after if possible) and the flight should be aborted if the whales show any signs of distress.



Leaving the encounter:

- When departing from watching whales, determine where the animals are relative to the vessel to avoid collisions or coming too close, and increase speed gradually once the vessel is 300m from the animals.
- All operators should keep a weekly log of trips including location, date, numbers of people, activity undertaken and duration of the trip as well as the number of whales observed and their location. This should be submitted to the Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources Division on a monthly basis.



Contact details and further information

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