

# Hawaii's other visitors, the beautiful giants

by Leighton Taylor

**Visitors** to Hawaii often remark to residents that it must be rather dull not having a change of seasons. It's true, Hawaii doesn't have the colorful leaves of fall or the lovely, brilliant white (and freezing cold) blanket of snow in the winter. But we do have the beautiful flowers of spring and the warm summer sun—year-round, of course.

Hawaii does undergo distinct, though subtle, changes in season and after you've lived here awhile these changes become more apparent. Some are as subtle as the slight drop in temperature and humidity in the fall. Others are as dramatic as several inches of rain in a week. One of the most spectacular signs of a Hawaiian winter is the arrival of the humpback whales to our near-shore waters. These beautiful giants are regular visitors and return here for the same reasons as many of our other tourists: to escape the rigors of northern winters, for rest, perhaps a little recreation and, in some cases, maybe a little procreation.

Hawaii may be unique in having these large baleen whales cavorting in such close proximity to large concentrations of people. It's true that relatives of the humpbacks, the gray whales, migrate from Alaska along the coast of North America to Baja California during the same time of year. Many people in California have had the thrill of seeing these whales as they pass San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego on their way to remote Mexican lagoons. But in Hawaii, the humpbacks have arrived at their destination and residents and visitors can enjoy swimming in warm Hawaiian waters in their company from late November till early May.

Hawaiian humpbacks are members of a cosmopolitan genus of whales that inhabit both the north and south Pacific

Leighton Taylor  
Photographer: Kimberly M. Gibson

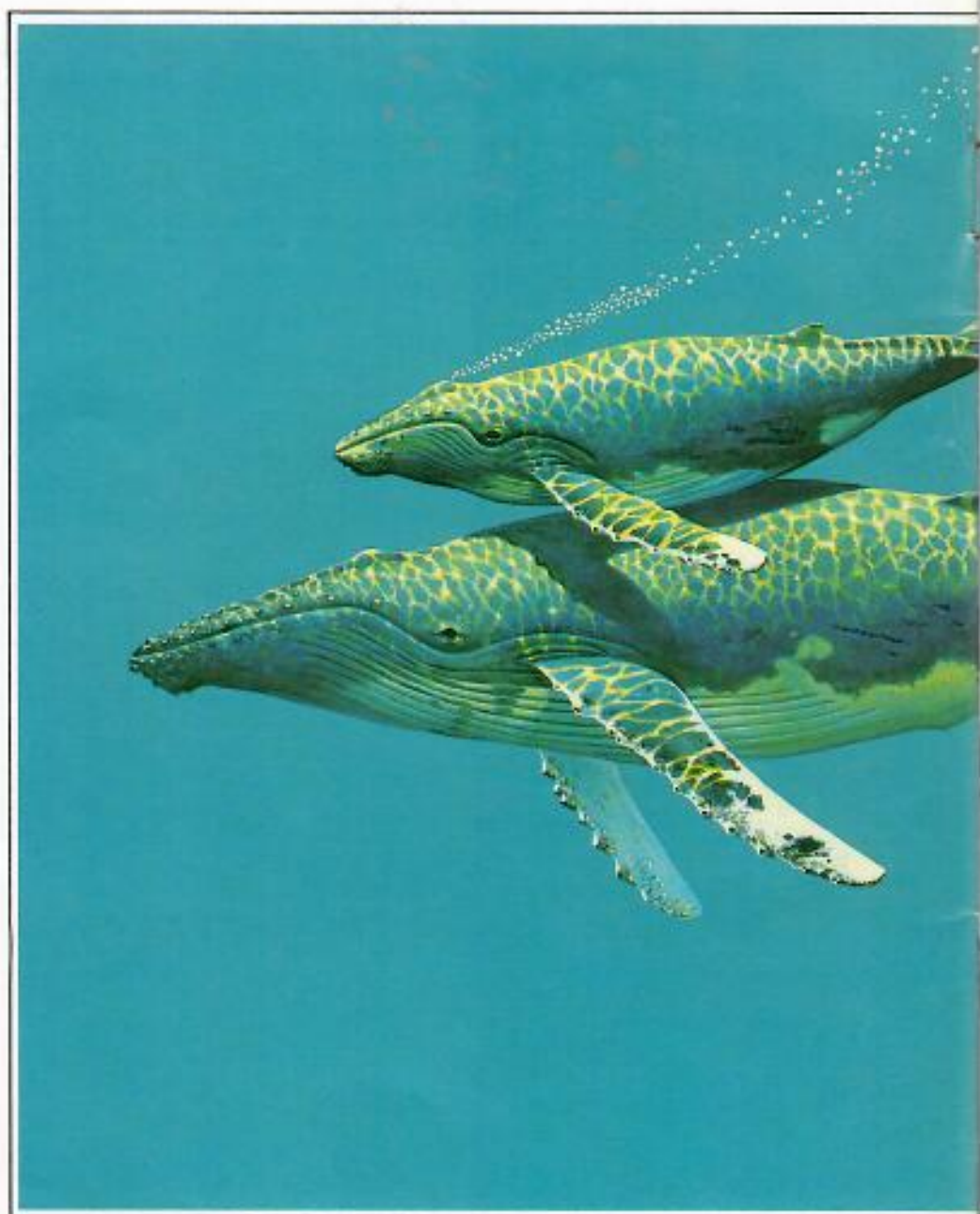


and the north and south Atlantic. Prior to decimation by intensive whaling activities, the north Pacific population of humpbacks probably numbered in excess of 15,000. It is estimated that this population now is less than 1,000. About half of these visit Hawaii every year. Scientists give this group of whales the tongue-tying name *Megaptera novaengliae* (literally: "New England big wings") because this species first was discovered off the New England coast. "Big wings" describes their very large pectoral fins.

Humpbacks, California gray whales, great blue whales and right whales belong to a large group known as baleen whales. They all share the characteristic of possessing large plates of comb-like baleen, derived from the palates of their large mouths. This material, once used by Victorian ladies to stiffen their corsets, is useful to the whales in sifting out small shrimp and crab-like animals from the water. Whales such as the sperm whale and killer whale have large teeth instead of baleen to process their primary diet of fish, squid and seals.

A unique and dramatic characteristic of humpbacks is their singing behavior. These immense creatures produce eerie, beautiful music which is thought to be used in communication and perhaps courtship. It is not known how humpbacks produce the sound, but noted whale researcher Roger Payne, of the New York Zoological Society, has found that individual whales within a population sing very similar songs and, although the "music" to these songs changes from year to year, definite themes are detectable from season to season. Perhaps they have their own musical fads. It's tempting to call these different themes the whales' "top ten songs," but the music is too symphonic for such an analogy.

Although you won't hear these songs on Hawaii's radio stations, they have been recorded by researcher Payne, his wife Katy, and by students and are available on a beautifully produced long-playing record sold in Hawaii. You can hear a different recording, made in the waters off Maui, when you visit the brig Carthaginian, a floating museum in Lahaina, Maui. Museum director Jim Luckey has the whale songs broadcast through speakers aboard the



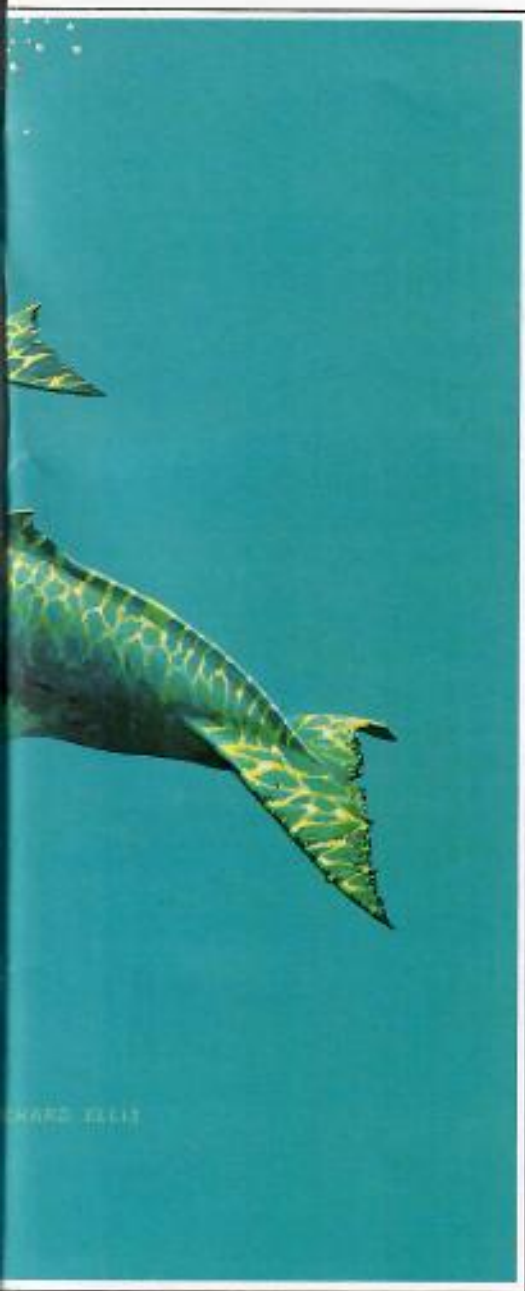
Painting by noted artist and writer Richard Ellis.

shipboard museum.

There is no substitute, however, for swimming in the water and hearing the whales first hand, knowing that the huge animal is sharing the same water—perhaps just a short distance away. Because of the physics of underwater sound it may be difficult to hear the songs clearly at the surface. You may have to dive down about 10 to 15 feet, keeping your ears open for the strange, unmistakable sound of humpbacks singing while you're swimming off Kaanapali Beach or, if you're lucky, even off Waikiki.

Scientists have learned much about humpback whales in Hawaiian waters and a number of excellent television documentaries have been filmed here. Research on these whales began fairly recently and has been most intense during the past five years. Researchers have come from a variety of distinguished universities in New York, Japan, Vancouver and California. However, Hawaii has its own resident whale researchers associated with the University of Hawaii, Sea Life Park and the Maui Whale Research Institute.

Dr. Lewis Herman of the University



vocabulary would reflect this awareness. Sperm whale teeth were used to make the famous necklace of the *ali'i* (royalty), the *lei palaoa*, but nothing is recorded of the humpback. Dr. Herman suggests that recent changes in water temperature and currents in the central Pacific may be the cause of humpbacks coming to Hawaii in winter. Whether or not this is true, everyone agrees that they should continue coming here.

What do we know of the whales' activities while they're in the 50th State? Much has been learned in the past half-decade, but many questions remain unanswered. No one has directly observed whales mating in Hawaiian waters, but reliable studies based on the examination of whales taken by commercial whalers in the southern hemisphere offer strong evidence that mating and conception occur in the winter. Recent observations in Hawaii also suggest that courtship takes place here. Some scientists have demonstrated that it is the adult males who sing and that aggressive encounters sometimes occur between singers. This suggests the courtship behavior that has been observed in other whales. The singers also are known to escort adult females with calves and such escorts occasionally show aggressive behavior toward other adults approaching the female, just the behavior one would expect from a courting male.

No one has yet observed the birth of a live calf in Hawaiian waters, but the abundance of young nursing calves with mothers is strong evidence that such calving does occur here. The use of nearshore shallow waters for calving is particularly important and the areas around Maui, Lanai and Kahoolawe seem to be popular maternity wards.

Humpback whale mothers, like all other mammals, must nurse their newborn young and probably do so for up to a year. However, little is known about nursing behavior. It is an activity particularly difficult to study because, of course, no one wants to disturb a nursing mother and baby. Most scientists agree that humpback whales do not feed while wintering in Hawaii, so a nursing mother must sustain both herself and her calf on reserves stored from summer feeding in such rich grounds as Glacier Bay, Alaska.

Unfortunately, like many other

species of whales, humpbacks are an endangered species. As such, they are protected by both federal and state law and there are a number of regulations and guidelines designed to prevent the disturbance of all whales, especially pregnant females, nursing mothers with calves and family groups. The best way to see whales from a boat is to go with a reliable commercial skipper on one of the half-day whale-watching trips available in Lahaina and Honolulu. With few exceptions, the whales and Hawaii's visitors and residents coexist to the benefit of both groups. The major threats to the whales in Hawaiian waters are overly zealous photographers and boat drivers who want "just a closer look" and may end up harassing the whales.

Recently, a proposal was made to the Office of Coastal Zone Management, U.S. Department of Commerce, for the creation of a national sanctuary for humpback whales throughout the State of Hawaii. That proposal now is being considered by Hawaii residents, State officials and federal agencies.

Both visitors and residents can participate in humpback whale studies. Perhaps you would like to join in this research effort. Scientists have found that the bumps along the margin of the back, along the tail and along the pectoral fins are individually specific and can act as "whale fingerprints." Photographs of whales taken as they perform their spectacular tail beats on the sea's surface, their breaching (leaping clear of the water), and their fin slaps have been consolidated into a "family album" of Hawaiian humpbacks. Scientists have compared these photographs with ones taken in summering grounds in Alaska and have identified the same individuals in both areas. Until very recently, it was thought that the Hawaiian humpbacks migrated annually only between here and southeastern Alaska and, indeed, comparison of pictures confirmed this migration. However, photos of humpback whales from the Revilla Gigedo Islands off the west coast of Mexico indicate that some of our humpback visitors also travel to the east when they leave us in the spring.

If you would like to join in this research effort, please send your photos of whales' tails and fins to the Waikiki Aquarium, University of Hawaii, 2777

of Hawaii has made a strong case that humpback whales have only begun to come to Hawaii fairly recently; that is, in the last 150 years or so. He has analyzed Hawaiian folklore and history and points out that, although the Hawaiians were well acquainted with toothed whales (notably sperm whales that occasionally washed ashore), there is no record of legends about the humpback whale. The Hawaiians were a very ocean-conscious people and certainly would have noticed these whales, had they occurred here, argues Herman, and Hawaiian folklore and



James Hudwall

Kalakaua Avenue, Honolulu, Hawaii 96815. Be sure to include the date and place where each photo was taken and we will assure that the photos are acknowledged and duly entered into the family album for all whale researchers to use.

So, when you tire of people-watching on Hawaii's beaches, try checking out some of our other tourists, the humpbacks. The best places to see whales in Hawaii are off the south and west shores of the main islands. They're here from late November to late April or early May but are most abundant in February and March. They can be seen off Waikiki but occur in the greatest numbers in the four-island area of Maui, Molokai, Lanai and Kahoolawe. There are many fine spots to watch whales along Maui's Kaanapali coastline and in the area from Lahaina southward. A great whale-watching vantage point is provided by the small commuter airplanes which fly lower than the large inter-island jets. Pilots sometimes run friendly competitions with passengers to see who can spot the most whales during flights between Oahu and Maui.

A friendly warning, however: keeping your eyes peeled for the sight of some of the largest living creatures in the world can be habit-forming and you might find yourself emulating the humpback whales' annual wintertime migration to sunny Hawaii. ①

*Dr. Leighton Taylor is the director of the Waikiki Aquarium (a department of the University of Hawaii) located on Waikiki Beach in Queen Kapiolani Park. Taylor is a graduate of the University of Hawaii and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. His research interests include sharks, seals, reef fish and whales — each of which provides him with a good excuse to dive and sail.*

## Where you can see whales

Sea Life Park, Waimanalo, Oahu is a world-famous oceanarium displaying some toothed cousins of humpbacks: killer whales, pigmy sperm whales, and spinner and bottlenose dolphins. There is also an excellent museum on whaling. Staff members of Sea Life Park are engaged in research on the humpback whale in Hawaii.

The brig *Carthaginian*, Lahaina, Maui is a meticulously restored square-rigged ship of the period in the 19th-century when whalers provisioned in Lahaina. Locally recorded whale music is broadcast throughout the ship. An excellent documentary on Hawaiian humpbacks, made in Maui waters, is shown and a whale-spotting map is kept up-to-date by the hour as tourists, residents and whale tour boat skippers phone in the locations of whale sightings. (Should you spot a whale, phone 661-8527 and give the location, number of whales seen, their direction of travel and any information you have on their activities.) This is the best place on Maui to check for whale information. Whale tours may be booked along the nearby

waterfront.

Your own hotel room window, if it faces the ocean, is a great place from which to see the humpbacks.

Whale tour boats are available at Kewalo Basin on Oahu and in Lahaina, Maui. Check your hotel's activities desk or visitor publications for specific information.

## Additional reading

*The Book of Whales* by Richard Ellis, published by Alfred Knopf and released in October, 1980. Available in bookshops in Hawaii and at the Waikiki Aquarium's Natural Selection Shop. \$25.

*The Humpback Whale*, a brochure distributed free by the Lahaina Restoration Foundation (Front Street, Maui) and the National Marine Fisheries Service, is available in a number of locations.

... and for the really serious reader

*The Hawaiian Humpback Whale Sanctuary Workshop Committee Report*, June 1980 is available from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Coastal Zone Management, Washington, D.C. 20235. Free.

Lahaina Restoration Foundation/Kimberly M. Gibson



# Hyatt's Hawaii

Volume 3, Number 1

First quarter 1981

## contents

Hyatt's Drums of the Pacific— "... only the best are chosen."	4
Flying free as the wind	8
Is there anything Mai Tai Sing can't do?	12
U.S.S. Arizona—her flag still flies	14
"... a pleasant place where all people shall be welcome."	20
Privacy in a small package	24
Hawaii's Citizen Prince	26
Hawaii's other visitors, the beautiful giants	29
Calendar of events	33
Free and easy	34

Our lead story describes Hyatt's Drums of the Pacific Polynesian Show presented weekday evenings at Hyatt Regency Maui. As you'll learn, the show is kept fresh and authentic by, among other things, an annual talent search through 12 million square miles of the South Pacific. The couple in charge of the show have built a two-week fill-in for Don Ho into a multimillion dollar slice of Hawaii's show business.

It isn't sailing and it isn't surfing. It's windsurfing and, according to Steve Lissau, it's the fastest growing sport in Europe and the newest addition to the Olympic Summer Games. And the world center for refinements both to equipment and sailing technique is right here, in Kailua Bay on Oahu's windward shore.

One would think that managing one of San Francisco's fashionable bistros would be enough to keep a person pretty busy. But if you were Mai Tai Sing, you also would land a starring role in a television series, co-host special television programs, model high-fashion clothing and open a second business. With several successful careers behind her, energetic Mai is in a "second marriage" that seems to be working just fine.

The U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, Hawaii's single most popular attraction, commemorates America's entry into World War II. But, as Jodi Belknap points out, it also is a symbol of hope for world peace. Her story also includes information on visiting this unique memorial.

Works of art from cultures around the world and throughout history are among the treasures you'll find at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. And there also are classes in art for amateur and professional, a vast lending collection, programs for Hawaii's schoolchildren and many other activities to enjoy.

Hyatt Kuilima Resort is the home of what may well be Hawaii's smallest

restaurant, the Wine Room. This open-by-reservation-only hideaway accommodates just 12—all the better for enjoying fine cuisine in complete privacy. In our story on pages 24 and 25 you'll also find recipes for two of executive chef Jorgen Rifsdal's specialties.

He never became king, but Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalanianaʻōle served Hawaii's people in several meaningful ways, including a 20-year stint as delegate from the Territory of Hawaii to the United States Congress. It is for the many accomplishments of Hawaii's Citizen Prince that his birthday is celebrated as a Hawaii State holiday. Charles Dodson's account begins on page 26.

Each year, the winter-weary are welcomed to these warm, sunny islands. Our largest visitors, the humpback whales, enjoy their sojourn in Hawaiian waters for many of the same reasons as our human visitors. Dr. Leighton Taylor offers many other insights into the behavior of these gentle creatures.

Aloha,



Edward G. Sullivan  
Regional Vice President  
Hyatt Hotels Hawaii



Gene Tinker, *Editor and publisher*; Ted Baptista, *Art Director*; Miles Hakoda, *Assistant Art Director*; Dan Merkel, *Cover Photo*.

HYATT'S HAWAII is published for Hyatt Hotels Hawaii by Gene Tinker, P.O. Box 88064, Honolulu, Hawaii 96815. Controlled circulation. Manuscripts or art submitted to Hyatt's Hawaii must be accompanied by addressed envelope with

return postage. Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or art. Publisher reserves right to edit material used.

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\$1.25

