

Whale pods

Location, type of whale, number of pods and season sighted

Only most frequent orca sightings included, covering all seasons



THAR TH

Thomas Bywater looks to the seas surrounding us in search of New Zealand's whales

A startling diversity of whales grace the oceans of New Zealand year round. Though actually seeing them requires a huge amount of luck. Many seagoing Kiwis have tall tales of encounters with these giants of the deep that would make even Paikea the whale rider jealous. I've never seen a whale up close, in New Zealand waters. Though I know they're there.

Perhaps what's most impressive about these massive sea creatures is that they're so hard to spot. Sighting a passing southern right whale is mostly a question of being in the "right place at the right time".

Fortunately the Department of Conservation has shared a sample of reported whale sightings with *Herald Travel* to help you better increase your chances of an encounter with New Zealand's biggest animals.

Encouraging responsible wildlife encounters, DoC want to help visitors experience these magnificent animals with minimal impact and the greatest respect.

"With most Kiwis living within an hour of the coast, most of us will be fortunate enough at some stage to encounter marine mammals," said Abigail Monteith, a communications adviser for DoC's Marine Mammals programme.

"Hunting in the past reduced many marine mammal populations to a fraction of their former size," she said, though the recovery in whale sighting numbers is reassuring.

People will travel almost as far as the migrating whales do for the chance of a sighting. Tourism ventures such as Auckland Whale and Dolphin Safari and Whale Watch Kaikōura lead guided tours which greatly improve the probability of a sighting, although whales are never guaranteed.

Last year DoC launched a new campaign to encourage Kiwis to give greater respect and space to wildlife around New Zealand's shores.

For pilots of drones and boats, the temptation is to get as close as possible to the animal you are observing, however DoC insists "keeping your distance is important to avoid stress and harm to wildlife".

Although the animals can be sighted all year round, winter is definitely whale-watching season.

"During the winter months, humpback whales travel up our coastline on their way from Antarc-



tica to the tropics," says Hannah Hendriks, who is in charge of DoC's marine mammal data. "The occurrences of southern right whales offshore increase as they come inshore from their off-shore feeding grounds." Though unfortunately, admits Hendriks "these occurrences are unpredictable".

Humpback whales may also be seen heading south in spring as they return to Antarctica to feed.

"October, November, back into December you have the migratory species returning south along our coasts."

To help increase your chances of meeting one of these ocean-going giants, we've put a guide of the best whale-spotting tips together, using DoC data.

WINTER: Humpback and southern right in Southland and Otago

Fortune favours the brave whale-watcher with bracing winter encounters.

Winter is peak whale season. Humpback and southern right whales arrive in greater numbers on the South Island.

Though most of us break in Southland whales love it. Their winter of New Zealand they win.

During this season Southland, Canterbury haven of Kaikōura. Sp deep coastal trenches population particularly yon. The east coast is the animals on their

The North Island sightings. These occur Palliser and even out have been seen swim Coromandel and off C

SPRING: Return season

The shoulder season of taking on the Kaik

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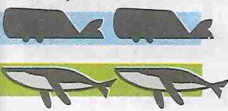
Bay of Islands

1 southern right



Great Barrier Island

2 sperm whale, 2 humpback



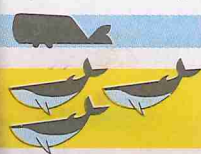
Omaha

1 southern right, 1 Bryde's



Auckland

1 sperm whale, 3 Bryde's



Coromandel

3 humpback



Raglan

1 sperm whale



Tauranga

2 Bryde's



Taranaki

1 humpback, 2 southern right



Hawke's Bay

2 southern right



Kapiti, Porirua

4 humpback, 2 southern right

Wellington

2 sperm whale

Cape Palliser

2 humpback

Cook Strait

1 humpback

OUR WHALE SUPERHIGHWAY

Bryde's whale *Balaenoptera brydei*

Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

Sightings of migratory whale pods swimming through New Zealand waters between 2016 and 2017

THEY BLOW

tail of a humpback whale. Photo / Images. Illustration / Richard Dale



A guide to responsible whale watching

Joanne Halliday, dolphin guide for Fullers GreatSights and founder of Whale-Rescue.org says an encounter is about respect and giving these huge animals time and room to manoeuvre.

Much of whale and dolphin behaviour is mysterious and completely different to land mammals, or humans for that matter. While they sleep, whales and dolphins continue swimming, she explains. "When people see dolphins, they don't necessarily understand that they're resting. It's a good idea to just stand off. Wait and watch to give time to read the situation properly."

Lastly to encourage responsible treatment of the animals and for the best chance of seeing whales or dolphins, it's advisable to book with a specialist guided tour such as Fullers GreatSights (dolphinscruises.co.nz) in the Bay of Islands or Whale Watch New Zealand (whalewatch.co.nz) in Kaikōura.

This year DoC updated its guidelines for those encountering marine animals. While enthusiasm and interest in wildlife is encouraged, DoC's key message to whale watchers is "give wildlife space".

- Don't get too close—drone pilots and boats should avoid coming closer than 150 metres and stay out of the animal's direction of travel.
- Avoid disturbing or making loud noises.
- Don't feed or dispose of rubbish near seals or other marine mammals.
- Keep boat movements slow and predictable if you should have an encounter while at sea.

To report a whale sighting call 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468) or visit doc.govt.nz/marinemammals Call 0800 DOC HOT if you see a deceased or stranded whale.

might find a winter beach-fairly bracing, migratory water in warmer waters north of the colder months.

Humpback whales arrive in July and the whale-watching term whale track along the coast and there is a semi-resident population around the Kaikōura Canal an ideal location to catch up the country.

Who experiences an uptick in sightings around Cook Strait, Cape Farewell and the east coast of Great Barrier Island.

to Kaikōura in the quiet

is the perfect time to think about a coastal trail.

Surprisingly few sightings around Kaikōura's coastline in recent years do with a lack of human disturbance.

Closures the whales have uninterrupted.

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on krill (tiny crustaceans) in Antarctic waters.

On the subject of gorging on crustaceans, the other wildlife Kaikōura is equally famous for is its crayfish. Nothing complements a whale sighting from the coast quite like a fresh-cooked crayfish with garlic butter, and perhaps a glass of sav blanc.

SUMMER: Orca in the Hauraki Gulf

Warmer waters bring gentle giants in range of holidaying Kiwis.

When we pack our chilly bins and head to the beach, summer is the perfect season for an encounter with orca and dolphins.

Orca swim around New Zealand all year, with most being sighted around the Hauraki Gulf, Waikanae and Tauranga. The black and white whales tend to be spotted in groups ranging from a couple to 12.

The best place to be during summer? The beach, of course! Orca pods can be sighted from land from the Hauraki Gulf through to the Bay of Islands.

In the South Island, pods have been reported from Otago, hugging the east coast past Canterbury all the way to Kaikōura.

You might even have a chance encounter with a bigger species swimming through.

Bryde's whales are also sighted in the Hauraki Gulf, though in far fewer numbers than orca.

AUTUMN: First migration through the Cook Strait

The tail end of summer is the perfect time for a migratory whale encounter.

There are still plenty of orca stalking the waters of New Zealand, but fewer sightings. This might have something to do with the end of the holiday season, and having less time to spend at the beach. However, there are still sightings around the North Island. The odd humpback and early arriving southern right whale can also be observed.

However the "big event" of autumn is the return of the adult sperm whales.

Sperm whales only migrate when fully mature. They make their seasonal journey from the Antarctic to mate in the warmer waters of the tropics over summer.

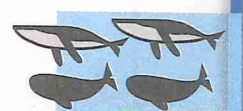
Sperm whales are often sighted from shipping passing the Cook Strait, returning from their jollies.

Melville's inspiration for *Moby Dick*, these enormous mammals can reach lengths of over 20 metres.

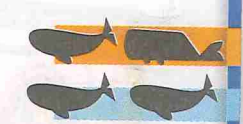
Most are sighted by commercial fishermen, well off shore in open water, although sightings have also been recorded from shore. Arapāoa Island was home to New Zealand's whaling industry and is now a prime spot for whale-watchers with more benign intentions.



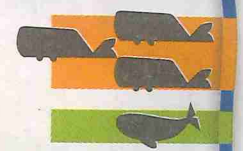
1 sperm whale
Chatham Islands



2 humpback, 2 southern right
Bluff, Foveaux Strait



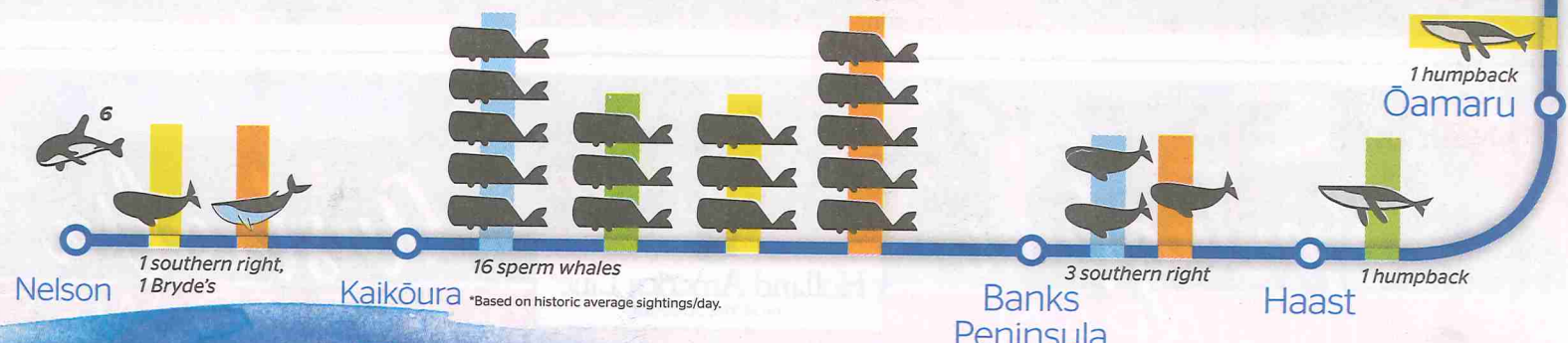
3 southern right, 1 sperm whale
Nugget Pt



4 southern right, 3 humpback, 7 sperm whales
Otago Peninsula



1 humpback
Oamaru



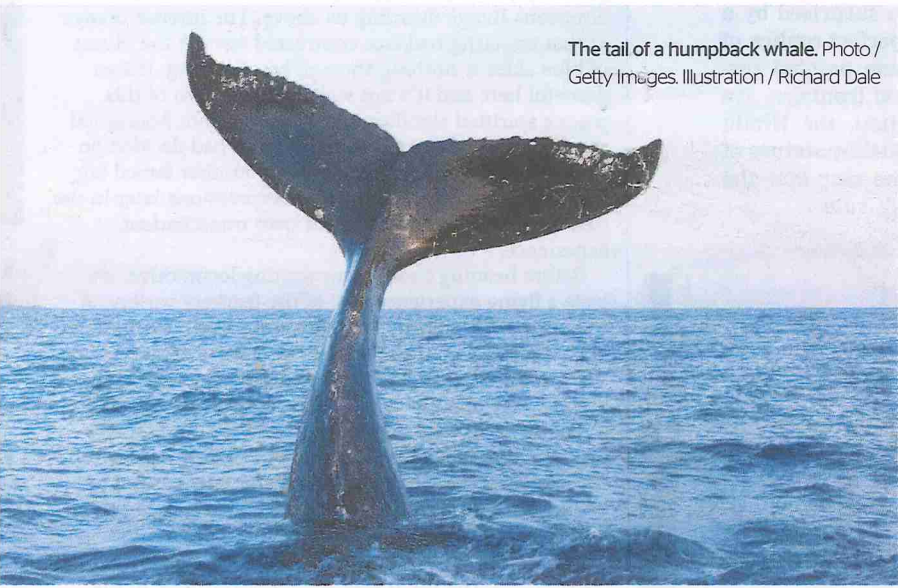
Humpback whale
Megaptera novaeangliae

Southern right whale
Eubalaena australis

Orca
Orcinus orca
Prevalent throughout our coastline in large pods of up to 15 whales

To report a sighting email: marinemammals@doc.govt.nz or visit: doc.govt.nz/marinemammals
Source: DOC Marine Mammal sightings voluntary reports
Herald graphic: Richard Dale

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The tail of a humpback whale. Photo / Getty Images. Illustration / Richard Dale

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Though most of us might find a winter beach-break in Southland fairly bracing, migratory whales love it. They winter in warmer waters north of New Zealand during the colder months.

During this season humpback whales arrive in Southland, Canterbury and the whale-watching haven of Kaikōura. Sperm whale track along the deep coastal trenches and there is a semi-resident population particularly around the Kaikōura Canyon. The east coast is an ideal location to catch the animals on their way up the country.

The North Island also experiences an uptick in sightings. These occur around Cook Strait, Cape Palliser and even outside Auckland. Humpbacks have been seen swimming up the east coast of Coromandel and off Great Barrier Island.

SPRING: Return to Kaikōura in the quiet season

The shoulder season is the perfect time to think of taking on the Kaikōura coastal trail.

There have been surprisingly few sightings recorded along Kaikōura's coastline in recent years, but this has more to do with a lack of human visitors rather than marine mammals.

During recent road closures the whales have continued to swim by uninterrupted.

Humpback whales tend to follow the west coast, out of sight of most people. However, Kaikōura's semi-resident whales can be seen even in spring along the trenches.

Well into spring, migratory whales pass through on their way back south to spend summer gorging

on krill (tiny crustaceans) in Antarctic waters.

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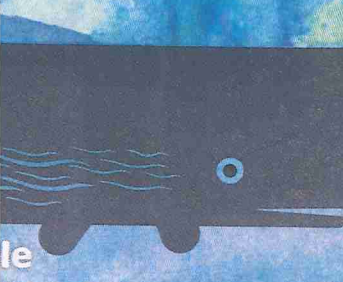
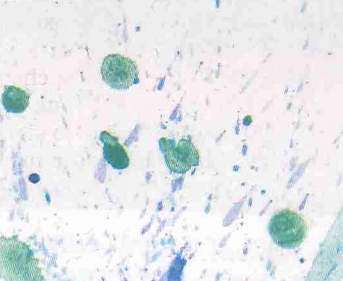
Melville's inspiration for *Moby Dick*, the enormous mammals can reach lengths of 30 metres.

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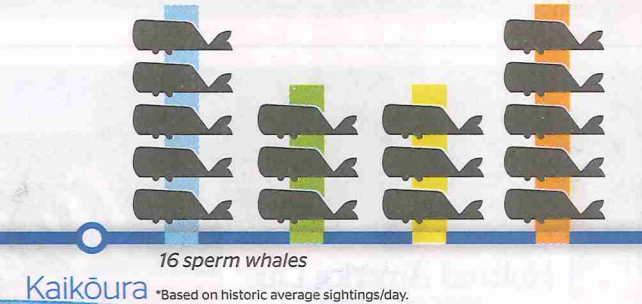
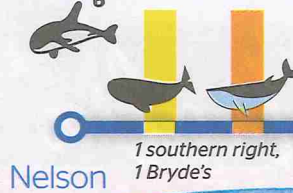
Humpback and southern right whale season

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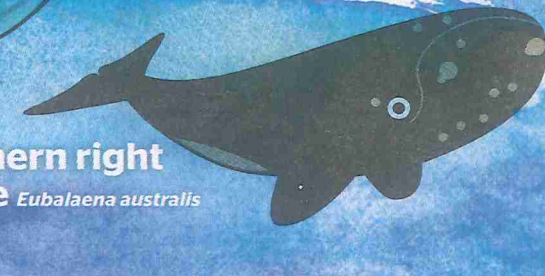
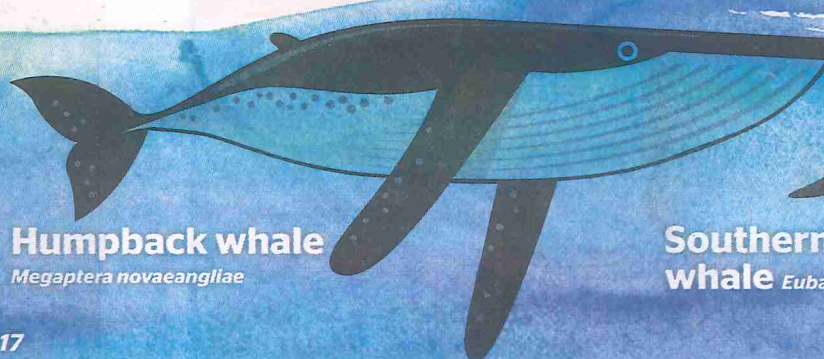
whale season. Humpback and southern right whales arrive in greater numbers in summer.



Humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*



*Based on historic average sightings/day.



Humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Southern right whale *Eubalaena australis*

Orca *Orcinus orca*