



2025 WHALE RESEARCH SUMMARY



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Our Whale Research Program

The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than 99% of the rest of the world's oceans. Temperature changes shift the distribution of whales and their prey, making whales vulnerable to human activities. Documenting what is happening in our local waters is more important than ever.

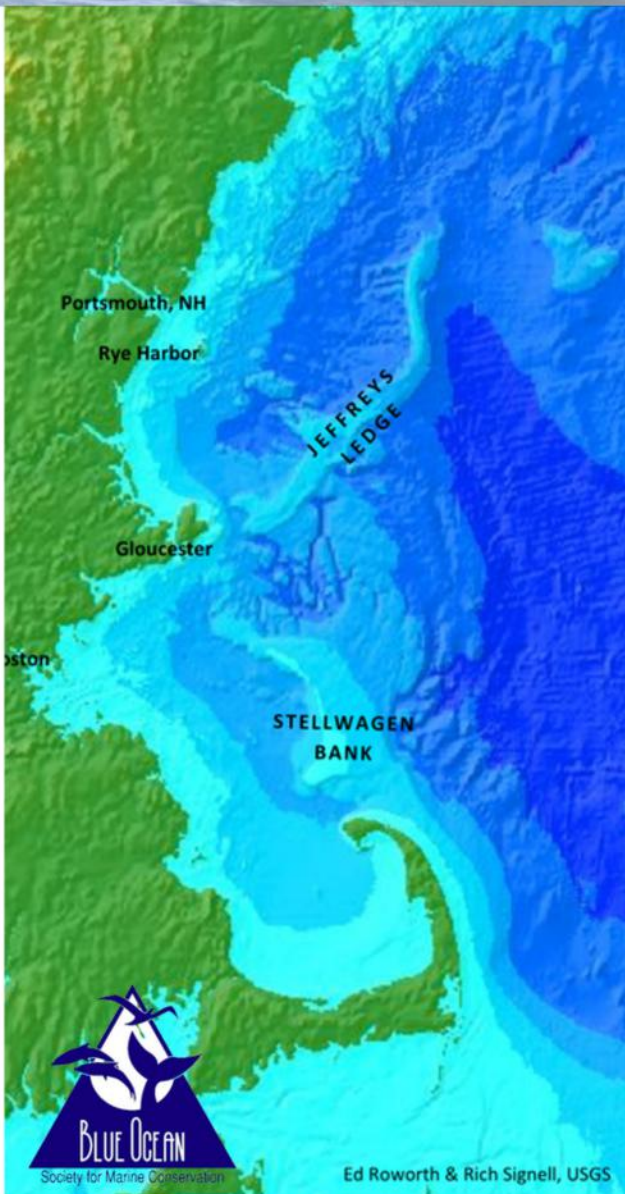
The health of local whale populations reflects the health of the Gulf of Maine as a whole. We aim to study whale behavior and distribution in order to mitigate human impacts.

About 20 miles off the New Hampshire coast lies an underwater mountain range teeming with marine life. We are the only organization that consistently studies whales in this region known as Jeffreys Ledge. We have studied these local whales since the late 1990s.

How do we study whales?

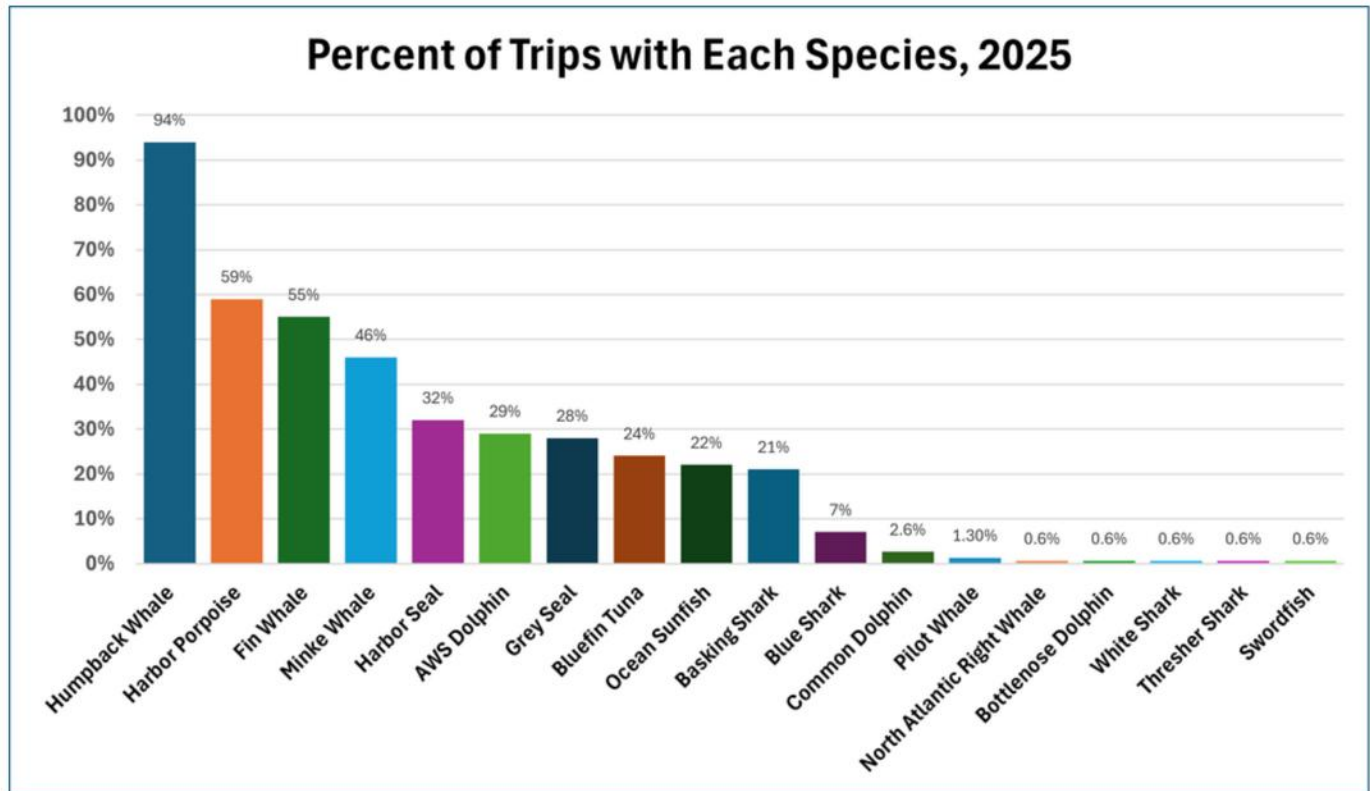


We tell whales apart by natural markings. For example, humpback whales each have a unique marking on the underside of their tail. Many whales return every year.



Ed Roworth & Rich Signell, USGS

Which Species Were Seen Most Often?



In 2025, we conducted 151 trips and saw a minimum of 4,211 animals. Humpback whales were seen most frequently, followed by harbor porpoises and fin whales.

Nineteen species were documented, including:

- 4 species of baleen whales
- 5 species of toothed whales
- 5 species of sharks
- 3 species of large fish (non-shark)
- 2 species of seals

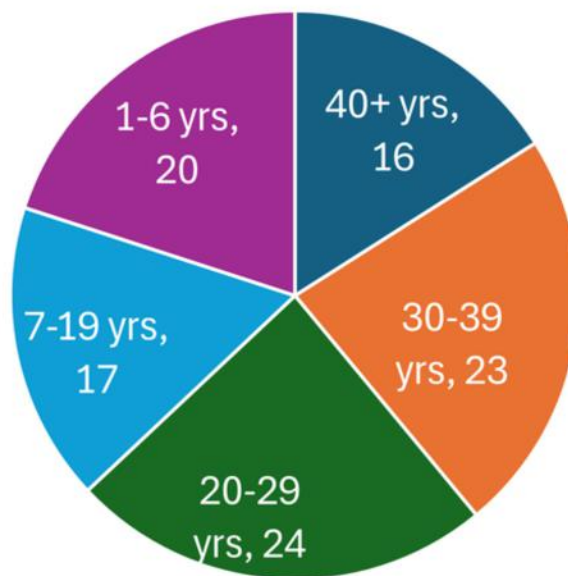
"Spoon," a well-known (and very large) female humpback whale



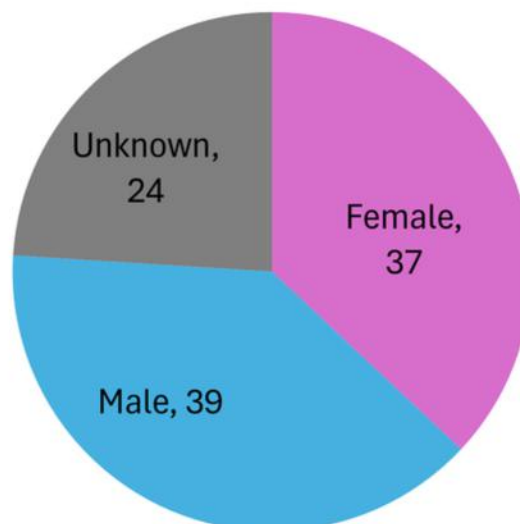
Humpback Whales

We observed 100 individual humpback whales. Interestingly, we did not see any calves this year. Of the whales with known age, the majority were adults (7+ years old). Sixteen of the whales were estimated to be 40 years old or more. Slightly more males were seen than females.

Number of Humpback Whales in Each Age Class



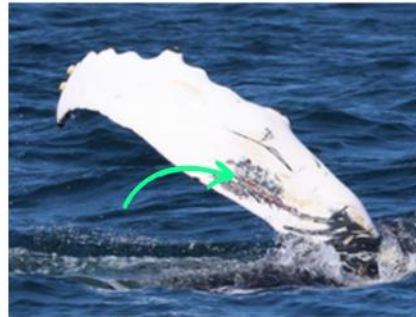
Gender of Humpback Whales



Human Impacts

Throughout the season, several humpback whales were documented with entanglements or recent injuries. Two cases are detailed below.

An unidentified humpback whale in behavioral distress was observed on Aug 16, 2025. The whale was agitated; repeatedly flipper slapping and rolling at the surface. Images showed the whale was significantly injured by a boat propeller that damaged the dorsal fin, left peduncle, flipper, and right fluke. It is believed that this whale had also been seen entangled in fishing gear two weeks prior off the coast of Maine.



Humpback whale with raw injuries on its dorsal fin, flipper, and fluke tip. This whale had been entangled in fishing gear and later showed injuries consistent with a boat collision.

Humpback whale, Spell, was documented with a persistent flipper entanglement on May 26, 2025. The entangling line appears to be monofilament fishing line. Spell was first documented with this entanglement in July 2023 on the southern end of Stellwagen Bank, off Cape Cod. It appears that the line is continuing to cut into Spell's flipper



Spell's left flipper (left) and a closeup of the flipper (right) showing a monofilament fishing line entanglement.



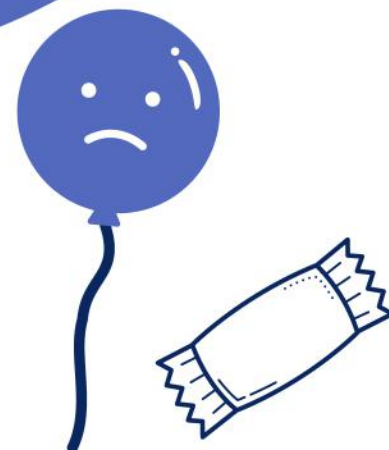
A total of 16,222 buoys were recorded within 30 meters of marine life sightings.

Baleen whales are more likely to become entangled in the vertical line between the surface buoy and the fixed fishing gear than other marine species. Baleen whales accounted for 900 of the sightings where cetaceans and buoys co-occurred. The number of buoys near baleen whales was 8,662, with an average of 9.6 buoys per whale sighted.

Marine Debris at Sea

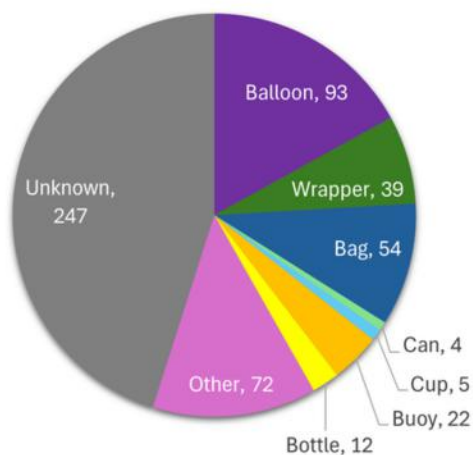
During each whale watch trip, we recorded sightings of marine debris. Some debris was retrieved when practical.

On 151 trips, we documented 548 pieces of marine debris, of which 93 (17%) were located near marine life. We use data on litter at sea, combined with our other litter studies, in our educational programs and to develop solutions.

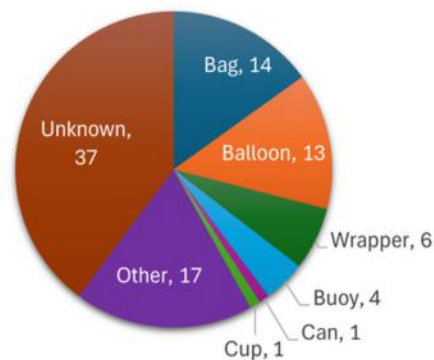


Balloons and wrappers were the top two litter items found on the water

2025 Pelagic Marine Debris Items



2025 Pelagic Marine Debris Items Near Marine Life



Whale research interns are tasked with recording sightings of marine debris that may pose a risk to nearby whales.



Want to Help Whales?

- Watch out for whales at all times when boating!
 - In recent years, whales have been seen in the Merrimack River, Piscataqua River, and within 3 miles of local beaches.
- Retrieve fishing lines from the water when whales are near!
 - Recycle used fishing line and spools in one of our shoreside recycling bins.
- Report whale sightings!
 - Contact us for more information.
- Support our research!
 - Donate boat time, give financially, adopt a whale, or sponsor an intern.

Thank You!

We are grateful to Granite State Whale Watch captains and crew, our research affiliates and staff naturalists, and our 2025 whale research interns, Zoe Cripps, Liam Gaffney, Haeley McCullough and Avery Waddell.

Thanks also to the Center for Coastal Studies for assistance with identifications and demographics.

Images in this report were taken by:
Matthew Mitchell, Melanie White, Dianna Schulte



**Our mission is to protect marine life in the
Gulf of Maine through research, education
and inspiring action.**

Join us for a beach cleanup, whale watch, or educational program,
and visit our Blue Ocean Discovery Center!

To learn more, visit us online or connect with us on social media!

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