

False Killer Whales of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands



HIPc308 sighted 2008-2015



HIPc426 sighted 2010-2015



HIPc431 sighted 2010-2021



HIPc523 sighted 2012-2020



HIPc528 sighted 2012-2025



HIPc531 sighted 2012-2025



HIPc891 sighted 2020



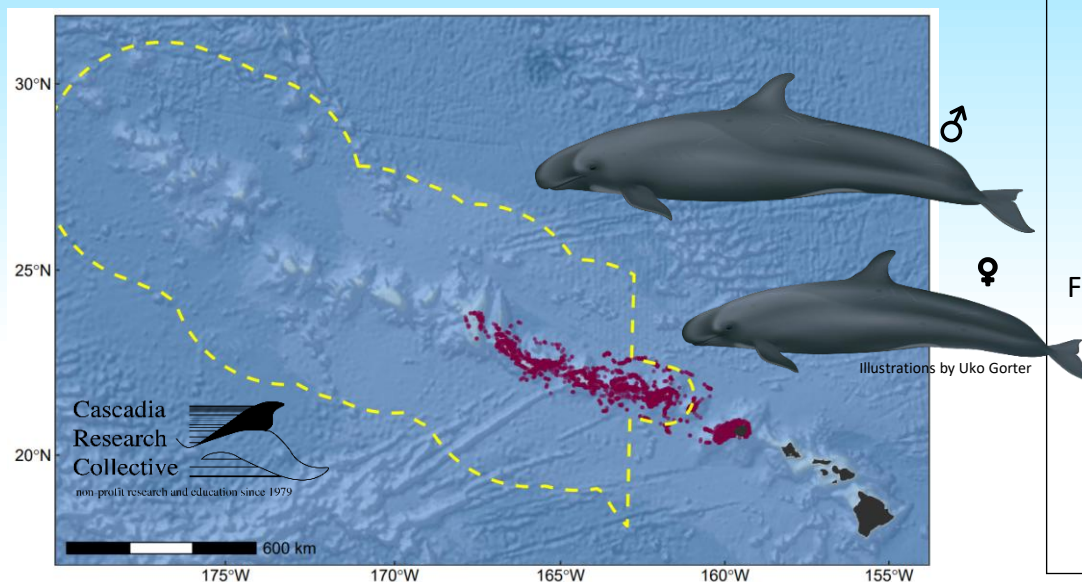
HIPc892 sighted 2020

False Killer Whales of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

False killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*) are a naturally rare toothed whale found globally in tropical and subtropical waters. They are most closely related to pilot whales, pygmy killer whales, and melon-headed whales. False killer whales may live into their 60s, and females only have calves every six or seven years, which makes them particularly vulnerable to human threats like bycatch in fisheries. There are three populations in Hawaiian waters: the endangered main Hawaiian Islands insular population, which ranges from west of Niʻihau to east of Hawaiʻi Island, an open-ocean population, which spends most of its time far offshore, and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) population. NWHI false killer whales were first described in 2013 using photo-ID and satellite-linked tag data that suggested these animals are part of an island-associated population separate from the endangered main Hawaiian Islands population.



NWHI false killer whales have a strong preference for nearshore and slope waters (<2,000 m depth). They primarily inhabit the waters of the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary (outlined below in yellow) but occasionally venture to Niʻihau, Kauaʻi, and farther west. Red dots indicate locations from nine tagged NWHI false killer whales. While the range of the NWHI population overlaps with that of the endangered main Hawaiian Islands false killer whales, these two populations are genetically differentiated, and have never been observed associating with one another.



The NWHI population was estimated to have ~477 individuals in 2017, though there is a great deal of uncertainty associated with the estimate due to how rarely these animals are seen. Given that their range overlaps heavily with the protected waters of the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary, NWHI false killer whales have so far largely been sheltered from the influence of most human activities, though they are still vulnerable to pollution, environmental changes, and fisheries interactions in the eastern portion of their home range.

We need your help!

To contribute photos of false killer whales or other species to our research, scan the QR code below, or email

Hawaii@cascadiaresearch.org



For more information on false killer whales, scan the QR code below

