

International Programs

Safe Boating Around Whales

Watching whales can be an amazing experience, but it can also be dangerous. Humpback whales can reach almost 18-meters in length, larger than many boats. A collision can harm both you and the whale. When the whale is a calf, or a boat is speeding, the injury could be fatal. Both engine powered and sail boaters need to practice safe boating around whales.



D.Cholewiak



J.Takaberry

- If you see a spout, a tail or a breaching whale, slow down and post a lookout.
- Some whales dive for 20 minutes or more, so be patient. If you have spotted one whale, more could be close by. Be sure to proceed cautiously.
- Do not sail or cruise directly at a whale's head. Approach from the side, behind or parallel to the animal's course, speed and direction.
- Respect the whale's behavior and keep your distance. Do not chase a whale or alter the whale's path by cutting it off.
- Do not risk striking a whale by approaching too closely. Getting too close to a whale may cause it to change its normal behavior or move away. Check local laws or guidelines for approved distances.



Whale and Dolphin Conservation

- If a whale decides to approach you, take the engine out of gear. Do not maneuver the vessel until the whale is out of harm's way.
- If other boaters want to view the same whale(s), try to contact them to coordinate your viewing efforts.
- Do not surround the whales or separate mothers and calves.



D.Cholewiak



E. Ganson

Special considerations for sailors:

- It is always good to be prepared. Remember that sailboats are very different from powerboats. Noisy engines can disturb whales, but sailboats can be quiet threats, even for whales with sensitive listening skills.
- Since whales have poor eyesight and trouble hearing sailboats, it is a good idea to turn on the engine when you know whales are nearby; if they can hear you, they are less likely to surface blindly underneath you.
- A boat under sail may not be able to reduce speed or stop at a safe distance from a surfacing whale. When in the vicinity of whales—about 500 meters—it is best to drop your sails and use your auxiliary engine.
- When maneuvering in the vicinity of a whale, it is easy to let the boat drift towards the animal. Make sure to keep a safe distance, because the closer you get, the higher the risk of disturbing the animal.

If a whale appears to be injured or entangled in fishing gear or marine debris, contact local authorities.

For additional safe boating information check Photo Tips at: www.caribtails.org