

# TANZANIA WHALE NETWORK

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## 2019 WHALE REPORT

By Gill Braulik & Danielle Stern (gillbraulik@gmail.com)



Humpback whale and calf surface west of Pemba.  
Photo credit: Gill Braulik

In June 2018 the Tanzanian Whale Network (TWN) was formed. The Network is an informal group of people who are frequently on the ocean in Tanzania that report on sightings of humpback whales in Tanzanian waters.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the group at the end of 2019 was 107 individuals, increasing slightly from 93 individuals at the end of 2018. It still includes most of the divers, recreational fishermen, sailors and water sports operators in the country. Also included are some of the marine park managers, marine biologists, conservationists, and fisheries specialists etc. Members live across the entire country, but there are large numbers from Mafia, Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam and fewer from Tanga and Mtwara/Lindi. Anyone can be a member of the WhatsApp group who is interested in reporting whales.

## HUMPBACK WHALES

Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are present in Tanzanian waters from June to November each year. They spend the austral summer months (Nov-March) in Antarctica feeding and make the long migration to give birth and mate in the relatively safe, warm tropical waters of East Africa. Now that whale hunting has largely ceased, humpback whale populations in East Africa are believed to be steadily increasing in number, and, as a consequence, humpback whale sightings in Tanzania and other nearby regions are becoming more common.



Beached Humpback whale in Songo Songo  
Photo credit: Kims



Mozambique Channel 2019.  
Photo credit: Caroline Langevoord

## WHALE RECORDS 2019

In 2019 a total of 27 whale sightings were reported, which comprised a total of 47 individual whales and included 3 calves. One report was of a stranding from Songo Songo. The first reported sighting of the year was on 19th July, and the last confirmed sighting was on 27th Oct. The largest number of records was in August (29).

The greatest number of whale records were from Dar/Latham and Mafia/Fanjove regions. This likely reflects the larger number of observers in those locations, not necessarily larger numbers of whales.

## COMPARISON OF 2018 & 2019 SEASONS

In 2018 a total of 467 whales were recorded by the Tanzania whale network, compared to only 47 whales in 2019 despite similar recording effort. This is a 90% decline in sightings from 2018 to 2019. The temporal pattern of records was similar between years with most whales recorded in August, but whales were present for a much shorter period in 2019; the first sighting was 7 weeks later and the last sighting was about 9 weeks earlier than 2018. In total duration the 2018 season was 29 weeks and the 2019 season was 13 weeks, roughly half as long.



Humpback whale seen diving near Mafia Island 2018.  
Photo credit: Mafia Island Diving

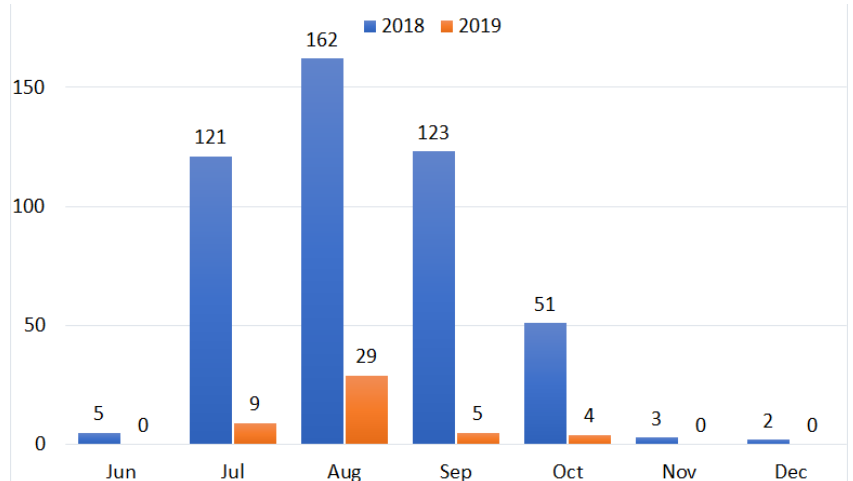


Figure 1: Total humpback whale reports per month from 2018 and 2019

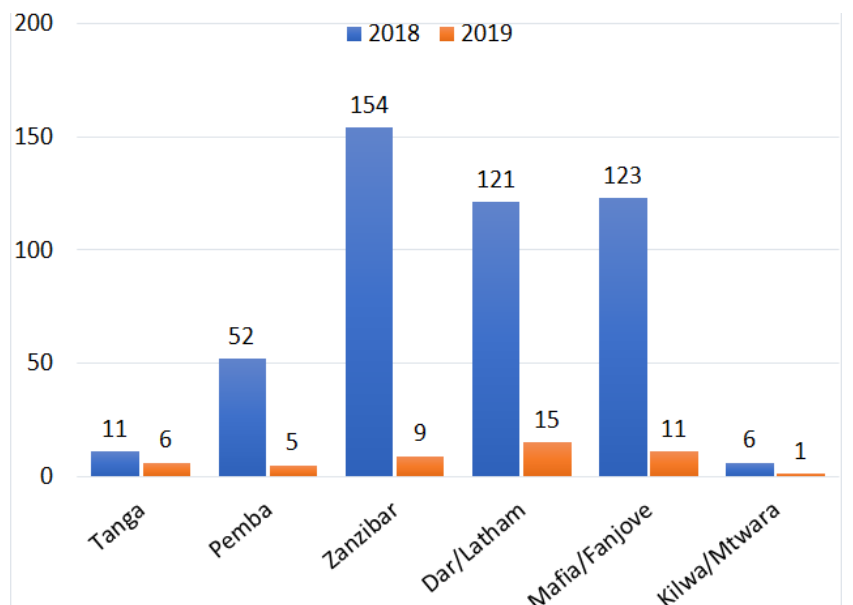


Figure 2: Humpback whale reports by Tanzanian region, North to South, from 2018 and 2019