

TANZANIA WHALE NETWORK: 2022

2022 CITIZEN SCIENCE WHALE REPORT

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REPORT OF SIGHTINGS

- In 2022, 201 different reports of humpback whale sightings, comprising a total of 666 individual whales, were made to the Tanzania Whale Network.
- A total of 55 calves were reported, comprising around 12% of all sighted whales.
- The first reported sighting of the year was on 7th July and the last confirmed sighting was on 15th November.
- Whale season lasted for 4 months and 9 days (132 days) in 2022.
- The largest number of sightings were in July (247 individuals) and August (273 individuals).

Whales Recorded by the Tanzania Whale Network in 2022

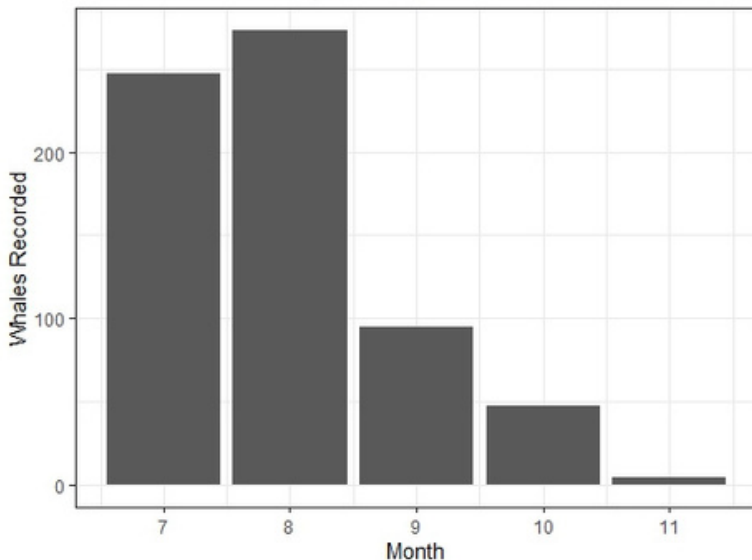
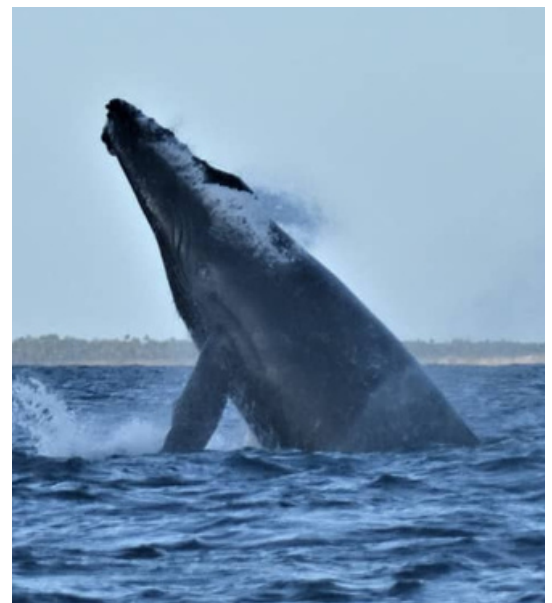


Figure 1: Total number of humpback whale individuals reported to the Tanzania Whale Network by month in 2022

The largest number of whales were reported from Zanzibar. This is likely to be because of the large number of people on the sea and reporting from this location due to the high numbers of tourists that visit the area (Figure 2).

NETWORK COMPOSITION

The Tanzanian Whale Network was formed in June 2018. The network is an informal group of people who are frequently on the ocean that report sightings of humpback whales in Tanzanian waters. Membership of the group at the end of 2021 was 132 individuals, increasing from 108 people in 2020, 107 in 2019 and 93 individuals at the end of 2018. It includes most of the locally resident divers, recreational fishermen, sailors and water sports operators in the country. Also included are some marine park managers, marine biologists, conservationists, and fisheries specialists, etc. Tourists are not typically members of the group, but many sightings are reported from the operators of trips that had tourists on board. 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.



A whale surfaces vigorously right in front of a group of observers in Mtwara in July 2022.

Photo credit: Katya Kalashnikova. COSTECH Research Permit N 2023-482-NA-2021-138



Two humpback whales surfacing near Tanga, 19th July 2022
Photo credit: Olivier Hamerlynck

REPORTS BY REGION

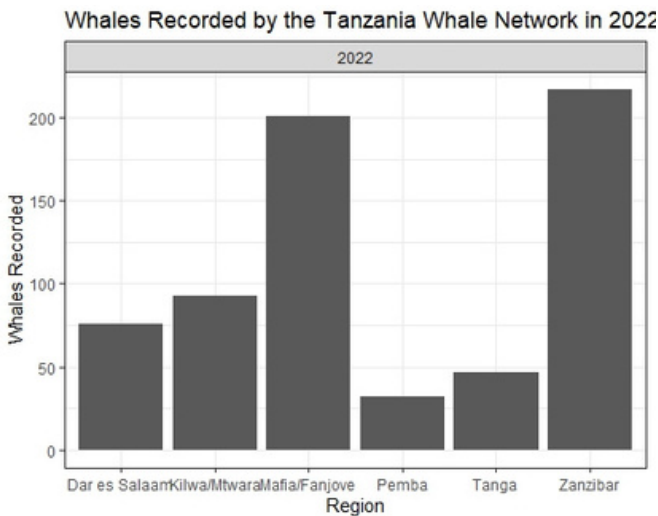


Figure 2: Total number of humpback whale individuals reported to the Tanzania Whale Network by region in 2022

COMPARISON OF 5 YEARS OF WHALE SIGHTINGS

The number of whales present in Tanzanian waters appears to vary dramatically from year to year. In 2019 and 2021 very few whales were reported (47 in each year), while 2018, 2020 and 2022 were all years where greater numbers (~350-650) were observed and reported.

The number of whales reported in 2022 was the highest since the Tanzania Whale Network began documenting whales.

The timing of the whale migration is similar between years with the peak numbers seen in August each year.



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 relatively safe, warm tropical waters, which include those in East Africa. Whale hunting has now largely ceased and humpback whale populations worldwide are recovering, and numbers are increasing.

Humpback whales are sighted regularly in Tanzania but the numbers vary considerably from year-to-year. In Tanzania the humpback whales are subject to threats from collision with high speed ferries, underwater noise and entanglement in fishing gear.

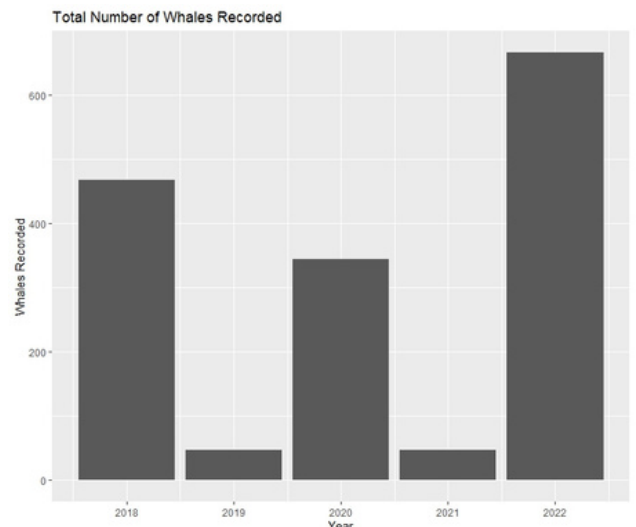


Figure 3: Total number of humpback whale individuals reported to the Tanzania Whale Network from 2018 to 2022.

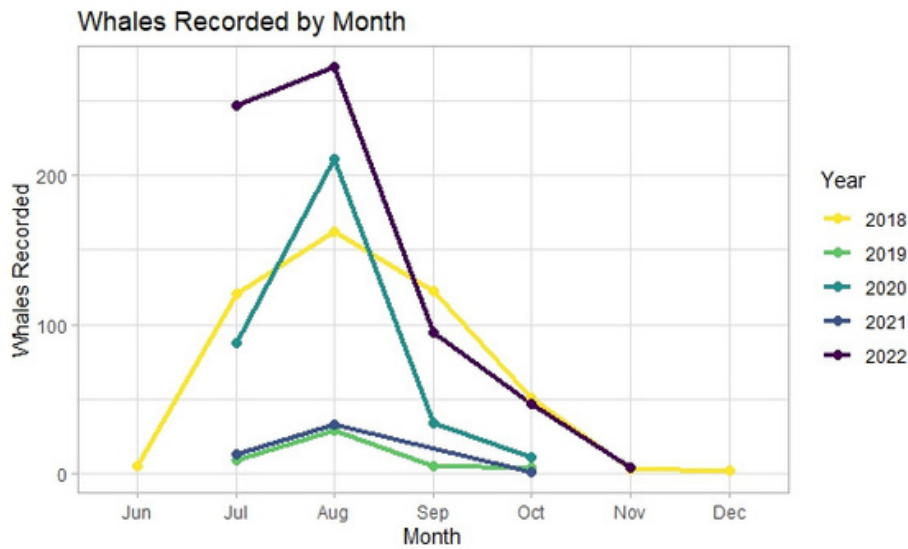


Figure 4: Number of whales (adults and calves combined) recorded each month throughout the last 5 whale seasons from 2018 to 2022. 2022 is shown in purple.

The length of whale season from the first to the last reported sighting each year has as follows:

- 2018 - 29 weeks
- 2019 - 13 weeks
- 2020 - 16 weeks
- 2021 - 9 weeks
- 2022 - 19 weeks

Generally, whale season appears to be shorter on years where fewer whales are reported.

SYNCHRONISED WHALE WATCH DAY (SWWD)

The 14th SWWD was held on 20th August 2022. Six teams in Tanzania participated from Tanga, Chumbe Island and Jambiani in Unguja, Ras Dege East and West near Dar es Salaam, South Mafia, and Rukyira and Songo Mnara Islands, Kilwa. A total of 88 whales were reported.



Figure 6: Humpback whale surfacing in Tanga not far from the Kenya border. Photo Credit: Olivier Hamerlynck

NEW WHALE SPECIES REPORTED

A video of a whale was recorded near to Latham Island on 16th November 2022 by Eric Allard. It was clearly an unusual cetacean species. Consultation among experts led to the consensus that the video showed a Minke Whale mother and calf and is likely to be an Antarctic Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*). Antarctic Minkes are known to occur in tropical waters but are generally not found in large numbers. This is a very interesting record, and shows the value of 'citizen science' for documenting rare species. Well done Eric and thank you for sharing!

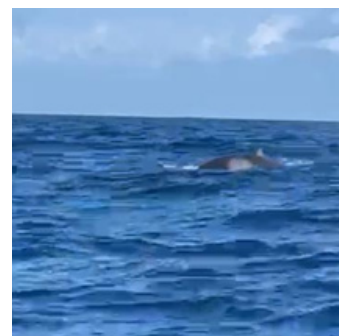


Figure 5: Screenshot from a video depicting an Antarctic Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*) mother and calf recorded near Latham Island on 16th November 2022. Photo/Video Credit: Eric Allard



Working together and using citizen science to monitor these gentle giants from our shores and boats will help us better understand the relative numbers and patterns of whales in Tanzania.

Keep those eyes on the ocean and ready for the next season!