

TANZANIA WHALE NETWORK

JANUARY 2019

2018 REPORT OF SIGHTINGS

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Humpback whale surfaces in view of Zanzibar.
Photo credit: Peter Bennett

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

After inception, membership grew rapidly; there are currently 93 individuals in the group. It 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 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.



Humpback whale breaching at South Pangani reefs.
Photo credit: Mike Fritsi



Mother & calf at Latham Island. Photo credit: Barret Harvey

COMMUNICATIONS

The Tanzania Whale Network currently communicates whale sightings via a whatsapp group. To join the whatsapp group, please get in touch.

There is also an online form for logging sightings and photos. Requests for people to report whale sightings on the online form were placed on prominent Facebook Groups: Team Tanzania and Zanzibar Residents.

[Click here for the online form](#)

WHALE SIGHTINGS

A total of 199 whale sightings were reported in 2018 which comprised a total of 467 whales, including 49 calves. The first reported sighting of the year was on 9th June, and the last confirmed sighting was on 30th Dec. The peak in humpback whale sighting records was between July and September, and the largest number of records was in August (162). (NB June records may be under represented as the Network was only formed at the beginning of June).

No calves were observed in June and only 5 were reported in July. In August, 12% of individuals were noted to be calves, and this rose to 17% of individuals in September and 50% in October. The largest number of whales in a single day were reported on 29th July (31), 1st Sept (29) and 16th Sept (25). The greatest number of whale records were from Zanzibar, Mafia and Dar/Latham. This likely reflects the larger number of observers in those locations, not necessarily larger numbers of whales.

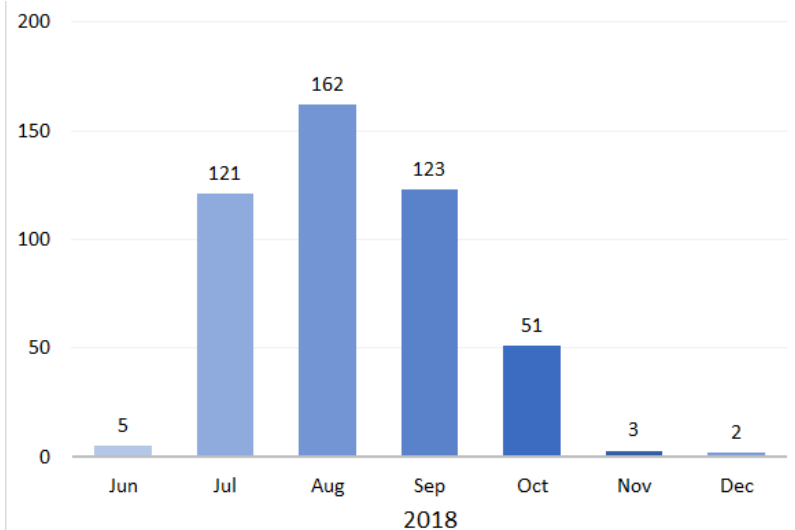


Figure 1: Total humpback whale reports per month

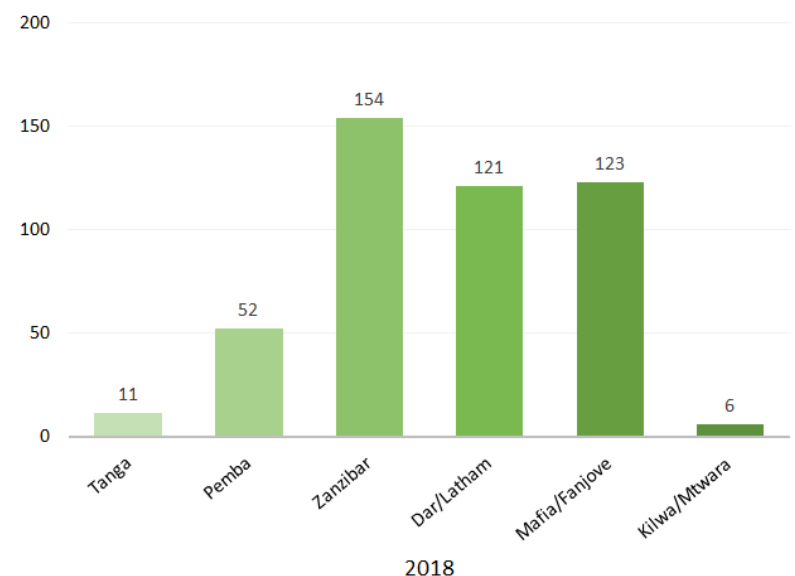


Figure 2: Humpback whale reports by Tanzanian region, North to South.