



Image Credit: Rob Owen (not for reproduction)

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## ***Realm of the Pacific Humpback***

EGBN Dateline:

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Of the countless remarkable and compelling ecological success stories that the EGBN News Team encountered on its extensive voyages to the Hawaiian Archipelago this Spring, the singular experience of seeing the Pacific Humpback Whale in its Polynesian Winter Habitat offered some of our most unforgettable memories. Arguably, the Pacific Humpback, known by the ancient Polynesians as the Samoan God of the Sea -- Tangaroa -- is one of the most regal and magnificent giant marine mammals to be found across the Western Pacific expanse.

Of all the Hawaiian Islands, Maui offers some of the most dramatic take-off points for seeing the Humpback in its winter playground, as the whale pods breed and the young mature into adolescence -- protected in large part by the aggressive and highly-effective wildlife management policies instituted by the Hawaiian State Government years ago. Found due north of Maui's famed Olowalu Petroglyphs, the old whaling outpost and now upscale resort town of Lahaina provides the takeoff point for dedicated whale watch excursions that sail out into the Maui Channel on a daily basis. Specially-designed high-speed, hard-skeleton, ocean rafts take adventuresome tourists out to meet The Humpback Whale, as it frolics throughout pristine, breezy waters in the channel between Maui's northwest shore and the outer islands of Lanai and Molokai, further to the northwest.

Here, ecologically-minded as well as merely-curious tourists and adventurers alike, can meet up with the Humpback -- up-close and personal. Courageous and feisty whales venture out to the edge of the high-speed boats, blowing bubbles from just under the water, and then rising vertically to inspect their human visitors, just before rolling over into a horizontal profile to blow and perform a classic fluke dive.

Confident but rarely aggressive, these whales demonstrate that mastery of this territory is entirely within their domain, and that humans are curious -- and perhaps welcome -- guests, who for the most part appear to refrain from becoming a nuisance, lest they run afoul of Hawaii's draconian wildlife protection laws and ever-present surveillance patrols.

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Recently sailing out of Lahaina, world-class marine photographer and whale naturalist Rob Owen , as well as the highly experienced maritime team from Maui Whale Adventures, enticed EGBN's Global Correspondent Julia Mineeva out to sea for a breathtaking experience with entire families of Humpback Whales, flying through an endless array of airborne acrobatics and a ballet of well-choreographed group breach behavior, executed with precision-defying accuracy. Perhaps strategically, or perhaps playfully, an occasional whale approached the low-profile sea raft to stream bubbles and pop-up to the surface, but for the most part, both adult whales and adolescent whales remained briskly on the move -- as they fed on the abundant organic microplankton plant-life of these waters.



Image Credit: Rob Owen *(not for reproduction)*



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The Pacific Humpback Whale is a highly-intuitive and socially-complex, high-speed ocean navigator -- which effortlessly-migrates thousands of miles between its summer homes in the Aleutians, Alaskans and Canadian Pacific Northwest, or coveted winter playgrounds off the Hawaiian surf and adjacent coral reefs -- where the Humpback exhibits a range of behaviors fascinating to world-class oceanographers, sea captains, and novice visitors alike. Capable of maintaining formidable horizontal cruise speeds, these mammalian sea giants routinely-exhibit rotational breach-jumps of stunning height, velocity and precision-geometry, hardly making a splash on re-entry into the water.

Notwithstanding their athletic power and prowess, elegance is one signature-behavior of the seductive Humpback, which competes within the species by exhibiting style rather than conflict. Pride in their young is a universal trait of the Humpback, who routinely present their calves even to awestruck boatside human visitors, or strategically hide them in hidden sea caves scattered along the coastlines of Maui, or the southwest Kona Coast of the much larger actively-volcanic island of Hawaii to the south.

On her brief adventure to the seas of Western Maui, our Julia Mineeva and her photographic marine-naturalist guide Rob Owen explored this intimate and unforgettable journey across the waters of the

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Lanai Channel, to experience a marine universe that is unimaginable to humans, at least until they have ventured there. EGBN is privileged to share Rob Owen's unparalleled photographic artistry and marine ecosystem insight with a few stunning and iconic signature photographs from his versatile high-resolution cameras -- providing our viewers with a momentary glimpse into the unforgettable world of the majestic Pacific Humpback Whale, on its 2021 winter excursion to the Hawaiian Archipelago.

As visitors observe this entirely-foreign universe, they can only gaze in awe, as the Pacific Humpback Whale masters its environment, from the depths below and from the freedom of the air above, singing and leaping in synchronized ecstasy and harmony, oblivious to even their human admirers.



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