



# NOAA FISHERIES

Pacific Islands Regional Office

# Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines for Hawai'i



Ocean recreation in Hawai'i can include frequent encounters with sea turtles and other marine mammals, including Hawaiian monk seals. But remember: **Sea turtles and marine mammals are protected under state and federal laws.**

## For all marine protected species

- View them respectfully — don't disturb them or do anything to change their normal behavior, including chasing, touching, feeding, or playing with them.
- Don't encircle marine mammals or sea turtles while snorkeling or swimming, and don't trap them between your boat and shore.
- Don't swim with wild spinner dolphins — they rest and nurture their young during the day.
- It is normal for turtles and seals to sleep on the beach. Don't attempt to push them back into the water — allow them to rest undisturbed and view as per guidance below.
- Follow recommended viewing distances (below) and limit your time observing animals to a few minutes. Use binoculars or the zoom feature on cameras to get a great view.

### Report Potential Violations or Harassment

(800) 853-1964  
respectwildlife@noaa.gov

### Report Entangled/Injured Marine Wildlife Emergencies

(sea turtles/seals/dolphins/whales):  
(888) 256-9840

## Wildlife viewing distances

- **Sea turtles:** View sea turtles - on land and in the water - from a distance of 10 feet (3 meters).
- **Humpback whales:** Federal law prohibits approaching a humpback whale by any means within 100 yards (90 meters).
- **Whales and dolphins:** Remain at least 50 yards (45 meters) away from all other whales and dolphins.
- **Hawaiian monk seals:**
  - Stay behind any signs or barriers when viewing monk seals
  - Give seals enough space by using the "rule of thumb." Make a "thumbs up" gesture and extend your arm out straight in front of you, with your thumb parallel to the ground in your line of sight of the seal. If your thumb completely covers the seal, then you're far enough away to not disturb it (about 50 feet or 15 meters).

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**Viewing marine wildlife responsibly helps ensure their protection  
and long-term survival in the wild, as well as your own safety!**

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