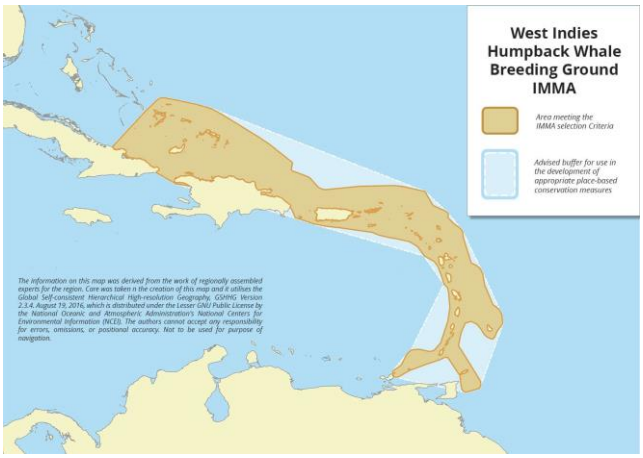

Area Size

502,105 km²

Qualifying Species and Criteria

Humpback Whale – *Megaptera Novaeangliae*

Criterion C (1)

Other Marine Mammal Species Documented

Balaenoptera acutorostrata, Balaenoptera borealis, Balaenoptera edeni brydei, Balaenoptera physalus, Delphinus delphis, Feresa attenuata, Globicephala macrorhynchus, Grampus griseus, Kogia breviceps, Kogia sima, Lagenodelphis hosei, Mesoplodon densirostris, Mesoplodon europaeus, Orcinus orca, Peponocephala electra, Physeter macrocephalus, Pseudorca crassidens, Stenella attenuata, Stenella clymene, Stenella coeruleoalba, Stenella frontalis, Stenella longirostris, Steno bredanensis, Trichechus manatus, Tursiops truncatus, Ziphius cavirostris

Summary

The IMMA is located in the Caribbean and includes the Lucayan Archipelago, the northern part of the islands of the Greater Antilles and the surrounding waters of the Lesser Antilles islands down to Margarita, Venezuela. It includes the shallow water coastal area around the islands, multiple carbonate banks, drop offs, canyons and channels between the islands. Although over 20

West Indies Humpback Whale Breeding Ground IMMA

Summary, continued.

marine mammal species occur in the area, this IMMA is designed to encompass the main breeding grounds for the North Atlantic humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). The area includes several marine mammal sanctuaries such as Banco de la plata y Navida, Sanctuary for the Marine Mammals of the Dominican Republic, the Yarari Sanctuary and the Agoa Sanctuary, as well as several other MPAs. Humpback whales are still hunted off the island of Bequia for aboriginal subsistence.

Description:

The habitat of the IMMA is made up of three archipelagos (Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, and Lucayan Archipelago) that consist of islands with varying depths and multiple drop-offs. It includes several bank systems with shallow water as well as deep-water canyons and many drop-offs out to the 2,000 m and 3,000 m (Lucayan Archipelago only) isobath. The water is relatively warm, with a predominant current from the east to the west. It includes several sanctuaries and other MPAs.

Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities Sub-criterion C1: Reproductive Areas

During the Boreal winter months, humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) from the North Atlantic migrate from feeding grounds of the Eastern coasts of Canada, and the United States, west Greenland, or the Northeastern Atlantic waters around Iceland and Norway, to this IMMA, to mate, give birth, and nurse

Figure 1: North Atlantic humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in this IMMA. Photo credit: Caribbean Cetacean Society.

Figure 2: North Atlantic humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) mother and calf pair. Photo credit: Caribbean Cetacean Society.

their young. Peak densities occur between February and March. They use the southern portion of the Lucayan Archipelago, especially the Turks Bank off the Turks and Caicos Islands, the Greater Antilles, and the Lesser Antilles. Many research groups and studies have shown that humpback whales can be found in the coastal areas, cays, canyons, and on the banks (Katona et al., 1984; Sanders et al., 2005; Caribbean Cetacean Society, 2023; Bacon et al., 2023, 2024; Hart & Bacon, 2022, 2024; Juredin & Berna, 2024).

The majority of research on these breeding grounds has been carried out in the high-density areas in the Greater Antilles, mainly the Dominican Republic (Silver Bank, Samaná Bay, and Navidad Bank) (Winn et al., 1975; Balcomb & Nichols, 1982; Whitehead & Moore, 1982; Mattila et al., 1989, 1994; Robbins et al., 2001; Betancourt et al., 2012) and Puerto Rico (Martin et al., 1984; Mattila, 1984; Mignucci-Giannoni, 1998; Swartz et al., 2002; Sanders et al., 2005; MacKay et al., 2016, 2019). Contrarily, small-scale studies have been carried out (partly due to little to no sighting effort in certain regions) in the Lucayan Archipelago (Winn et al., 1975; Balcomb & Nichols, 1978; Winn & Winn, 1978; Clapham & Mattila, 1990; Smith et al., 1999; Swartz et al., 2002) and the Lesser Antilles (Winn et al., 1975; Levenson & Leaply, 1978; Mattila & Clapham, 1989; Swartz et al., 2003; Clapham et al., 2005; Rinaldi et al., 2009; Gandilhon, 2012; Fossette et al., 2014, 2017; Kennedy et al., 2014; Stevick et al., 2016, 2018). Recently, humpback whale survey effort has increased in portions of the lower-density areas of the Lucayan Archipelago, mainly the Turks Bank, Turks and Caicos Islands, by the Turks and Caicos Islands Humpback Whale Project (Bacon et al., 2023, 2024; Hart & Bacon, 2022, 2024), and in the Lesser Antilles by Beyond the Reef and the Caribbean Cetacean Society (Campos Cuellar, 2023; Caribbean Cetacean Society, 2023, 2024; Juredin & Berna, 2024; Bernus et al., 2024).

Figure 3: North Atlantic humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) mother and calf pair on the Turks Bank. Photo credit: Katharine Hart of the Turks and Caicos Islands Whale Project and Deep Blue Charters.

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