Whale Watching
Land Based

Organisation for the Rescue & Research of Cetaceans in Australia

Information for land-based whale watching ORRCA's Annual National Whale Census Day

Any headland which provides a good view (preferably 180º) of the ocean is definitely worth a visit.

As the Humpback whale migration peaks in mid-winter, warm clothing is essential and it doesn't hurt to be prepared for rain! Bear in mind at that time of year three seasons in a day is not uncommon on the coast.

An early morning start at about 7:30 am is ideal as it is usually calm at this hour i.e. little or no wind. It is easier to see the blow against a backdrop of calm sea and thus "get your eye in" for the rest of the day. Be aware that at this hour you will be looking directly into the sun so don't forget to pack your sunglasses.

A pair of binoculars is a must, and please takes plenty of food and drink.

Also please don't forget sun protection. Clothing wise, it is ideal to dress in layers and we would advise a warm hat, gloves, socks and scarf!

If your chosen site doesn't have seating, take a comfortable, collapsible chair.

A clipboard with several copies of the sighting log and a reliable pen are essential.

Tips and Techniques

You are better off scanning the ocean for whales with the naked eye and then using binoculars once you have located an animal. Prolonged viewing of the ocean through binoculars can cause headaches and some people even develop a type of motion sickness after a time.

Your initial clue as to the presence of a whale is usually the *blow* – a column of vapour formed above the whale's head as it exhales. An animal may blow once, twice or several times between dives and this is to be recorded on your log sheet.

Sometimes the first thing you see may be a large, dark shape on the surface or even a huge splash as an animal *breaches* (leaps clear of the water) or indulges in some other form of display. Use your binoculars to zoom in and observe the animal(s) as closely as possible.

Whales can also leave *footprints.* These are smooth, circular patches of water caused by the up-and-down movement of an animal's tail flukes. Sometimes they appear just before a whale surfaces and sometimes they appear after. Either way they signify the presence of a whale swimming close to the surface and are worth tracking.

Try to be systematic in your search; divide the ocean into imaginary sectors and scan one sector at a time. Whether you start at the horizon and work towards shore or the other way round doesn't matter as long as you are consistent. If you have company allocate a different sector to each person.

This is not an endurance test and you will need regular breaks; ask a companion to monitor your sector while you have a snack, drink, walk or whatever.

Please remember to phone the Hotline to report every sighting.

The locations listed opposite have been utilised in the past and if you wish to use one of these, please be aware that as some sites are on public (i.e. Council) land we can't set up any form of stall or display, nor can we sell raffle tickets or merchandise without Council approval.

This usually means submitting a Development Application, believe it or not. However, if we have a site within a National Park permission to conduct such activities is usually granted. If that is what you wish to do please let us know as the ORRCA committee will have to submit the application.

South Coast

Booderee National Park - Cape St George Historic Lighthouse
Hill 60 – Port Kembla
Kiama – Bombo Headland
Ulladulla – Warden Head

Sydney

Bondi
Cape Solander
Tamarama – MacKenzie Point
North Head
Barrenjoey Headland

Central Coast / Newcastle

Bateau Bay – Crackneck Lookout
Copacabana
Norah Head
Newcastle North – Streslecki Lookout
Redhead
Wybung Head

Mid North Coast

Anna Bay / Shoal Bay
Port Macquarie – Tacking Point Lighthouse

North Coast

Byron Bay

Queensland

Point Lookout, North Stradbroke Island

Tasmania

Maria Island

Do you have a favourite spot of your own?

If so, please email us on orrca@orrca.org.au so we can add it to the list.

Thanks for being a part of our Annual Whale Census Day.

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