

## **Photo-identification and satellite tagging of false killer whales during HICEAS II: evidence of an island-associated population in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument**

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### Introduction

Two populations or stocks of false killer whales have recently been recognized within the Hawaiian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Carretta et al. 2011). An insular, or island-associated, population is found around the main Hawaiian Islands, and a pelagic, or open-ocean, population, has been documented in offshore waters (Chivers et al. 2007, 2010; Baird et al. 2008, 2010). Based on movements of satellite-tagged individuals, the range of the Hawaiian insular population extends throughout the main Hawaiian Islands from Ni‘ihau in the west to Hawai‘i Island in the east, and movements out to 122 km from shore have been documented (Baird et al. 2010, 2011). Individuals can be attributed to one or the other population based on genetics (i.e., mitochondrial haplotypes; Chivers et al. 2007, 2010), or on photo-identification matches of distinctive individuals. While the number of distinctive individuals from the pelagic population that have been photographically documented is small (29 noted in Baird 2009) and no re-sightings of individuals have been documented to date, the majority of individuals in the insular population have been photographically documented multiple times (Baird et al. 2008; Baird 2009). The insular population is relatively small (estimated at about 150 individuals, see Oleson et al. 2010), and Baird et al. (2008) noted that, on average, within a group of insular individuals, 75% of distinctive individuals photographed have been previously documented, thus assigning individuals to one or the other population based on photo-identification can be done with some certainty if more than a few distinctive individuals from any group are photo-identified.

Baird (2009) noted that of all the distinctive individuals documented within 40 km of shore of the main Hawaiian Islands (524 identifications of >100 individuals) only 13 identifications did not link by association to the insular social network<sup>1</sup>. Four of these 13 individuals were documented off the island of Hawai‘i, in three encounters where only single individuals (two encounters) or a pair of individuals were identified, thus the likelihood of finding matches with the Hawai‘i insular population is small. Nine identifications were available from the island of Kaua‘i, including seven from one encounter in July 2008, but none matched to the insular social network (Baird 2009). Baird (2009) noted that, given the small sample size, it

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<sup>1</sup> As of August 2011 there are now over 900 distinctive identifications obtained from within 40 km of shore of the main Hawaiian Islands and only one additional distinctive individual has been documented that does not link to the insular social network. This individual was documented off Kaua‘i.

was unclear whether these individuals photo-identified off Kaua‘i were part of the insular population, part of the pelagic population, or members of a third, as yet un-described, population.

## Methods

In 2010, the National Marine Fisheries Service undertook a large-scale survey throughout the EEZ surrounding the Hawaiian Islands (HICEAS II) to assess population structure and abundance of false killer whales, among other goals. Two vessels used a combination of visual and acoustic detection methods, and all detected groups of false killer whales were approached, and attempts were made to photograph all individuals and obtain biopsy samples for genetic studies (see Martien et al. this meeting). All photographs were compared within and between encounters to determine the number of individuals documented and re-sightings of individuals. All individuals were also compared to the catalog of false killer whales from the main Hawaiian Islands (Baird et al. 2008). During one encounter, LIMPET satellite tags (see Andrews et al. 2008; Baird et al. 2010) were deployed on the dorsal fins of two individuals. The satellite tags used a location-only Wildlife Computers SPOT5 transmitter in the LIMPET configuration with two 7.5 cm titanium attachment darts. The tag was held on an arrow with a custom-made urathane holder. Tags were programmed to transmit daily for nine hours per day with the hours corresponding with the hours of best satellite coverage. Here we report on the results of the photo-identification comparisons and the information obtained from the satellite tag deployments.

Photographs for individual identification were graded for photo quality and individuals were categorized in terms of distinctiveness following the protocols of Baird et al. (2008). Photos of all qualities and individuals of all distinctiveness categories were compared among HICEAS II encounters and with the existing Hawai‘i false killer whale photo-identification catalog by two experienced matchers, although Baird et al. (2008) note that only distinctive and very distinctive individuals (Distinctive categories 3 and 4) with good or excellent photo qualities (Photo Quality categories 3 and 4) should be used for quantitative analyses, to minimize the likelihood of false positives and false negatives.

## Results and Discussion

During the HICEAS cruise there were 11 encounters with false killer whales from which individual identification photographs were obtained (Figure 1; Table 1). From these there were 91 identifications, not accounting for re-sightings among encounters. When only good or excellent quality photos of distinctive or very distinctive individuals (hereafter “well-identified individuals”) are considered, there were 28 identifications from eight encounters.

Using either the complete photographic data set or only considering well-identified individuals, re-sightings among encounters were only documented for three encounters, all within the eastern third of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Figure 2). During the first of these encounters (26 September 2010) satellite tags were deployed on two individuals (see below). Information from one of the satellite tags was used to direct one of the two research vessels in the survey to the general area of the tagged whale approximately a month after tagging, resulting in the two additional encounters where there were re-sightings from the 26 September encounter. For these three encounters, considering only well-identified individuals there were eight individuals documented 26 September 2010, one individual documented 20 October 2010, and eight individuals documented 21 October 2010, and matches of distinctive

individuals linked all three encounters (Table 1). There were no re-sightings of individuals from the remaining groups photographically documented during HICEAS.

Satellite tags were deployed on two adult-sized individuals in a group encountered on 26 September 2010 near Nīhoa in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands. One of the tags attached with only a single dart in the fin (PcTag24), and transmitted for 4.6 days. The other tag (PcTag25) attached with both darts in, but the holder separated from the arrow and remained attached to the tag on deployment. No transmissions were received from this tag for the first three days after tagging, but locations were then received daily for a span of 52 days, presumably after the holder dislodged and uncovered the salt water switch on the tag. Locations from both tags were processed through the Douglas Argos-Filter following the same criteria for previous satellite tag deployments on this species (Baird et al. 2010). After filtering, 34 locations were obtained from PcTag24 (61.8% of which were LC3, LC2 or LC1) and 337 locations were received from PcTag25 (55.8% of which were LC3, LC2 or LC1). Both individuals remained in the area around the eastern half of the northwestern Hawaiian Islands (Figure 3), largely, but not entirely, within the boundaries of the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument. Both individuals covered a wide range in depths (Table 2); median distance from land for the two individuals was 38.6 km (PcTag24) and 55.0 km (PcTag25).

All HICEAS photographs were also compared with the existing false killer whale photo-ID catalog including individuals from the insular population from the main Hawaiian Islands as well as the small number of individuals from the main Hawaiian Islands that did not link to the insular social network (13 individuals), and the 29 individuals from the pelagic population. No matches were found between HICEAS photos and any insular or pelagic false killer whales. The only matches were with individuals previously documented off Kauaʻi whose population identity was not known. Regardless of restrictions by photo quality or distinctiveness, individuals from two HICEAS encounters (26 September 2010, 21 October 2010) matched with individuals previously documented off Kauaʻi (Table 1). One of the individuals that had been previously documented off Kauaʻi was seen in May 2008 and June 2008, while the other three individuals previously seen off Kauaʻi were seen in July 2008. All four of these were seen 26 September 2010 near Nīhoa, and one of the four was also seen 21 October 2010.

We documented photographic re-sightings among three encounters in the eastern portion of the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument almost a month apart, and individuals from these groups matched with several individuals documented off Kauaʻi in 2008. The lack of any re-sightings of individuals from the main Hawaiian Islands insular population suggests that the individuals documented off Kauaʻi and off Nīhoa are not part of the main Hawaiian Islands insular population. Combined with movements of two satellite tagged individuals from one of these encounters that remained generally associated with the eastern half of the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, our results suggest that there is a second island-associated population of false killer whales in Hawaiian waters, that primarily use the northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The range of this population is known to overlap partially with the main Hawaiian Islands insular population, as satellite tagged individuals from that population have been documented off the western side of Kauaʻi and Niʻihau (Baird et al. 2011). Despite the small sample size available of satellite tag locations, the known range of this population is remarkably similar in scope to the range of the main Hawaiian Islands insular population (Figure 4), although clearly additional satellite tag deployments would help establish the range of this population.

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Table 1. Details on sightings during HICEAS II with photographs suitable for individual identification including information on matches within the HICEAS dataset and between these encounters and encounters in the main Hawaiian Islands

Date	General Location	# IDs all	# matches within HICEAS II	# matches MHI <sup>1</sup>	# IDs Dist3+ PQ3+ <sup>2</sup>	# matches within HICEAS II Dist3+ PQ3+	# matches MHI Dist3+ PQ3+	Biopsy	Notes
9/01/10	N of Midway	9	0	0	1	0	0	Y	
09/05/10	N edge of EEZ	3	0	0	0	0	0	N	
09/07/10	N of Pearl & Hermes	2	0	0	1	0	0	N	
09/10/10	NE of Pearl & Hermes	7	0	0	2	0	0	Y	
09/26/10	SW of Nīhoa	25	9	4	8	3	1	Y	2 tagged
09/27/10	W of Hawai‘i Island	1	0	0	0	0	0	N	
10/07/10	SW of Gardner Pinnacles	4	0	0	3	0	0	Y	
10/20/10	NW of Nīhoa	2	2	0	1	1	0	Y	from tag
10/21/10	W of Nīhoa	20	10	1	8	4	1	Y	from tag
10/29/10	Lana‘i	1	0	0	0	0	0	N	
11/10/10	SW of Midway	17	0	0	4	0	0	Y	

<sup>1</sup>MHI = Main Hawaiian Islands. All matches with the MHI were with individuals documented off Kaua‘i that do not link by association to the insular social network. <sup>2</sup>Dist3+ PQ3+ = identifications restricted to distinctiveness categories of distinctive (3) and very distinctive (4) and photo qualities of (3) good and (4) excellent.

Table 2. Characteristics of satellite-derived locations from two false killer whales tagged during HICEAS II.

Individual	Number of locations	Water Depth (m)			Distance to land (km)			Distance to 200 m isobath (km)		
		Min	Median	Max	Min	Median	Max	Min	Median	Max
PcTag24	34	22	1,532	4,082	7.1	38.6	104.1	0.1	4.1	34.7
PcTag25	337	9	2,506	5,127	2.0	55.0	147.5	0.02	17.1	89.9

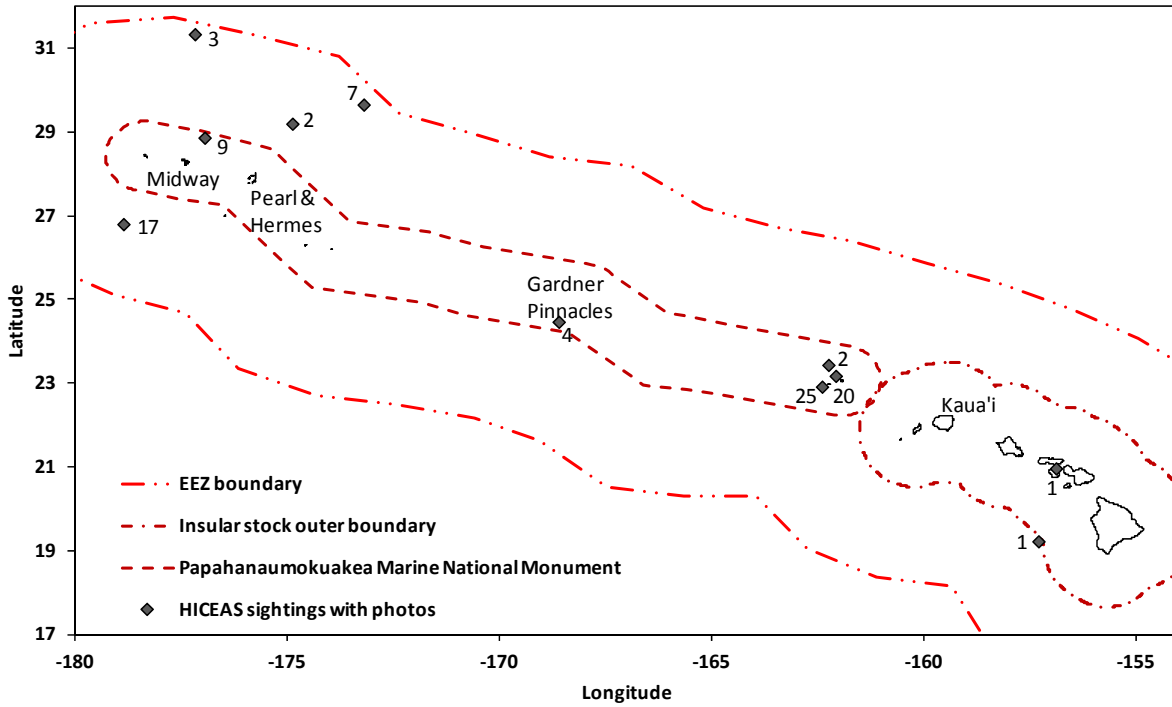


Figure 1. Sighting locations of false killer whales encountered during the HICEAS II cruise with photos available. The number of identifications (disregarding photo quality and distinctiveness) for each sighting are indicated next to the sighting location.

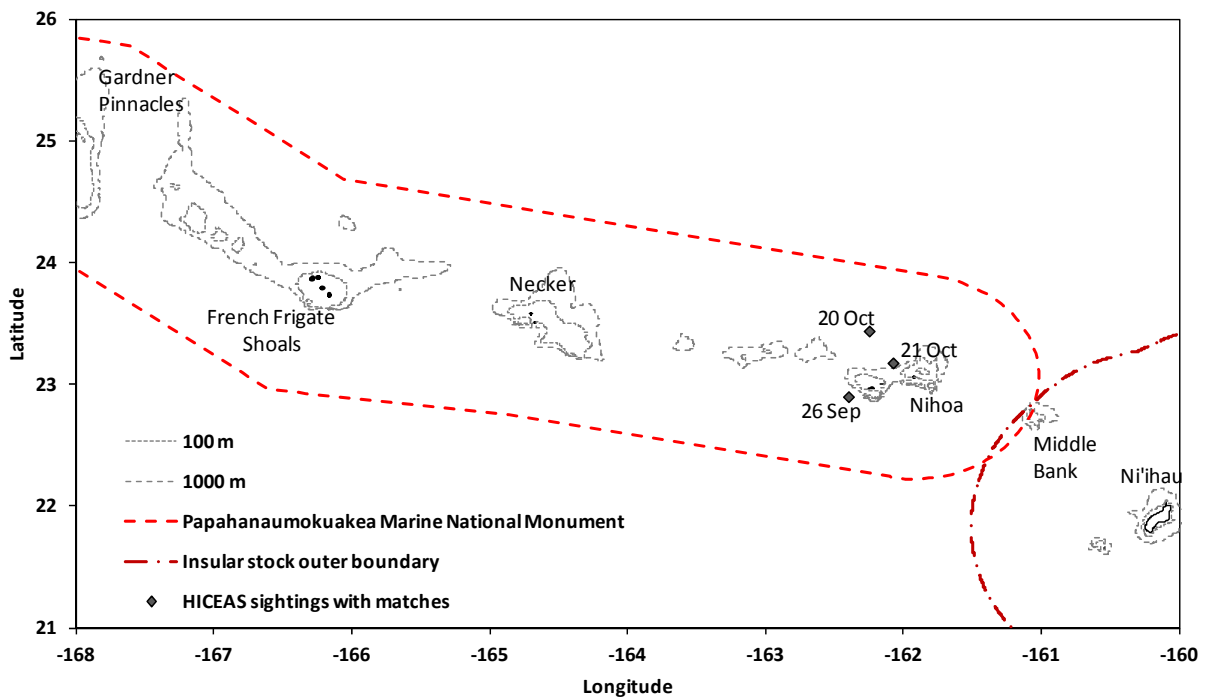


Figure 2. Sighting locations of false killer whales encountered during the HICEAS II cruise with photographic matches of individuals among encounters.

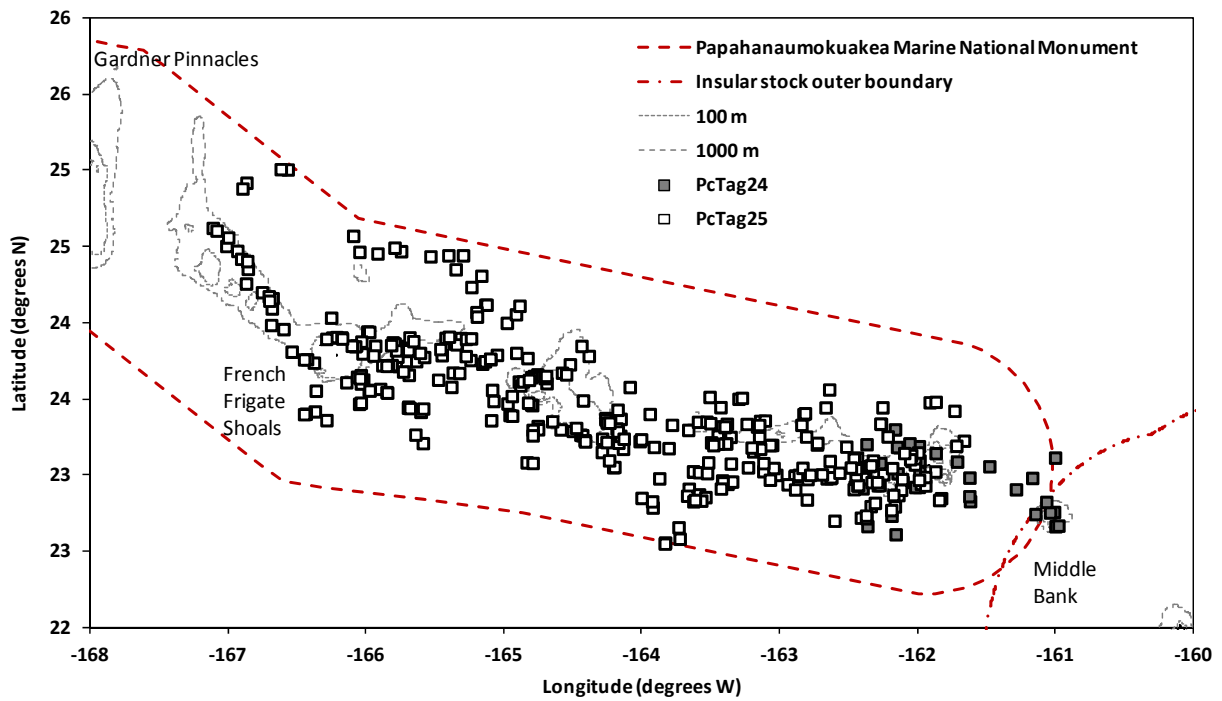


Figure 3. Locations of tagged false killer whales after filtering with the Douglas Argos filter.

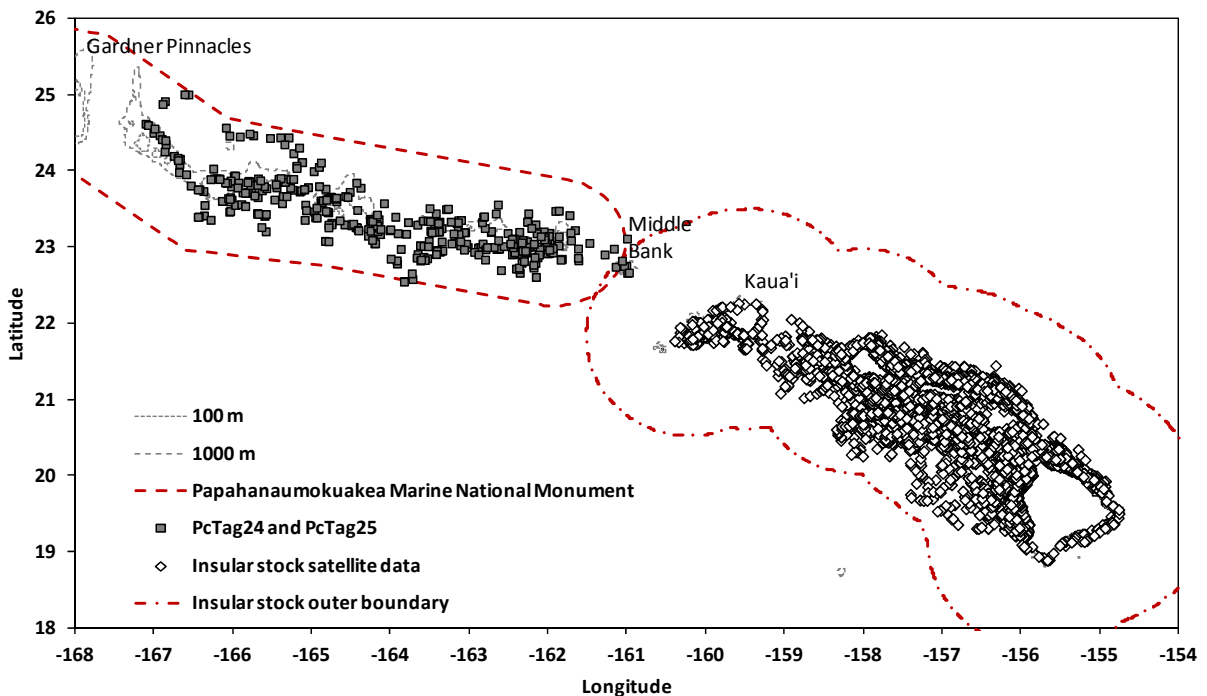


Figure 4. Locations of satellite tagged false killer whales from HICEAS II (PcTag24 and PcTag25) and from the main Hawaiian Islands insular population (data from Baird et al. unpublished).