



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* and other pelagic species
UK Overseas Territory: Turks & Caicos Islands

Importance: Humpback Whales are a major tourist draw, particularly on Grand Turk and Salt Cay where they swim slowly by with their newborn calves on their northward migration early each year.

Ecosystem: This population of Atlantic Humpback Whales migrates annually from their feeding grounds in the North Atlantic to their calving grounds north of Hispaniola. They calve near the shallow banks between the Turks and Caicos Islands and Hispaniola.

Threats: Continuous disregard for the whales' sensitivity to noise and disturbance is their most significant threat in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Blasting and dredging for the Cruise Terminal on Grand Turk had unknown consequences on them and future proposals for enlarging these ports and adding new ports could threaten the whales too. While they are not hunted in the Turks and Caicos Islands, or legally anywhere within their range, they may be threatened by any whale-watching vessels that disregard the strict laws for approaching them.

Needs: Strengthening of international agreements on the protection and policies around whales, their habitats, and whale-watching would be beneficial. Restriction of fishing practices that threaten them in their feeding grounds are necessary. Reduction of maritime waste, particularly ropes and lines, is crucial for their survival.



Above: Humpback Whale breaching; © visittci.com; below: Humpback Whale mother and calf. © Deep Blue Charters GT



Although Humpback Whales stay in the tropical waters of the Turks & Caicos Islands to give birth, their main feeding areas for much of the year are in the rich fishing grounds of the North Atlantic. Here a Humpback starts a deep dive in front of the mouth of a glacier in West Greenland. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF