

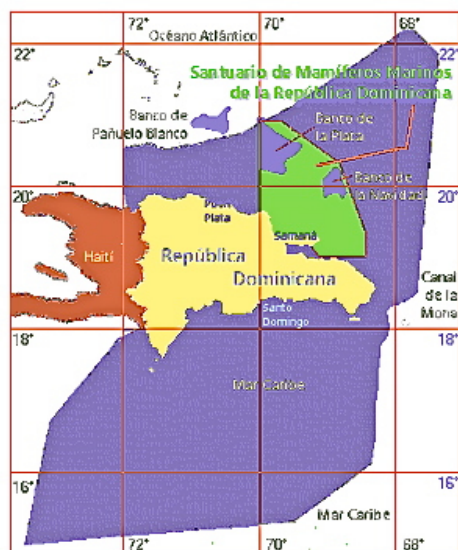
International Programs

World's First Sister Sanctuary Agreement Links Stellwagen Bank and Dominican Republic

In December 2006, the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources established the world's *first* Sister Sanctuary agreement between NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and the Santuario de Mamíferos Marinos de la República Dominicana .

Humpback whales are long-distance migrants, but highly faithful to specific feeding and breeding areas. Long-term research shows that individuals spend the summer and fall in the rich feeding grounds of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Maine and then in late fall migrate some 1,500 miles south to the warmer waters of the Dominican Republic to mate and give birth to their young.

The Dominican Republic was the first Caribbean nation to establish a marine mammal sanctuary. The Silver Bank Humpback Whale Sanctuary was created in 1986, and expanded in 1996 and 2004 to include Navidad Bank and part of Samana Bay, covering the three



Map of Santuario de Mamíferos Marinos de la República Dominicana

main humpback breeding grounds in Dominican waters.

Today the Dominican Republic's sanctuary protects all marine mammals within its 19,438-square kilometer area, and is the largest whale sanctuary in the northern hemisphere. The area attracts the largest breeding aggregation of humpback whales in the North Atlantic, with more than 3,000 individuals sighted within a season.



Salt's Flukes

Photo: Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies

The first documented sighting of a whale from Stellwagen Bank on Silver Bank off the Dominican Republic was "Salt" in 1975. Her sighting confirmed the north-south migration route of humpback whales. Since then, researchers have found that a significant number of mother-calf pairs from Dominican waters make the trip to Stellwagen Bank, where the young learn to feed and mothers regain weight after their winter-long fast and nursing period.

Santuario de Mamíferos Marinos de la República Dominicana was created consistent with the objectives of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean (the Cartagena Convention) and its Protocol on Specially Protected Areas for Wildlife (SPAW), and the United Nations Environment Program's Marine Mammal Action Plan for the Caribbean region, which recognizes the importance of protecting critical humpback whale habitats as well as their migratory corridors.

The sister sanctuary agreement between the Stellwagen Bank sanctuary and the Dominican marine mammal sanctuary helps improve humpback whale recovery in the North Atlantic by increasing public awareness and support for marine mammal conservation through joint research, monitoring, education and capacity building programs.

This effort will help improve knowledge about humpbacks in the Atlantic and the threats they face from both natural and man-made changes to their environment. NOAA anticipates the relationship will be crucial to the long-term conservation of the North Atlantic humpback whale population, as well as to the development of future cooperative agreements with other countries.

Website: www.associatives.org/silverbank.de/index.html
Press: http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/dr_press.pdf
MOU: http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/dr_mou.pdf
Renewal: http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/dr_mou_001.pdf