TAIL OF A WHALE SIGHTED OFF HAWAI‘I ISLAND  
First 2011 Humpback Whale Spotted in Honaunau Bay

HILO, HAWAI‘I – Hawai‘i’s 2011 whale season appears to have gotten off to an unusually early start with this week’s first confirmed sighting of a humpback whale in waters off Hawai‘i Island.

On Monday, September 26, a Sea Quest Hawaii morning snorkel tour with six passengers and Capt. Tony Roensch spotted a splash and a tail fin in Honaunau Bay on the South Kona coast. According to Kyle Fields of Sea Quest Hawaii, Roensch believed the whale to be a yearling.

“It’s always exciting to see our aquatic friends from Alaska return to our warm waters,” said George Applegate, executive director of Big Island Visitors Bureau. “We look forward to a robust whale season and encourage visitors to take advantage of the many sightseeing activities Hawai‘i Island has to offer.”

The Big Island Visitors Bureau’s website is a great reference tool for visitors who would like to catch a glimpse of the majestic creatures, including suggestions on activity providers and best locations for whale watching – http://www.gohawaii.com/big-island/guidebook/topics/whale-watching

“The whole West side of Hawai‘i Island offers calm waters where whales like to hang out,” said Justin Viezbicke, Hawai‘i Island programs coordinator for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

Whale season typically runs from November through May, with sightings being reported as early as October. During that time, an average of 12,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters. “We usually start seeing juvenile whales in October so this sighting is early in the season,” he added.

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Viezbicke encourages people to report sightings to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). For more information, visit the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary website at http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/

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**Special note to media:** The Big Island Visitors Bureau (BIVB) recognizes the use of the ‘okina [’] or glottal stop, one of the eight consonants of the (modern) Hawaiian language; and the kahakō [ā] or macron (e.g., in place names of Hawai‘i such as Lāna‘i). However, BIVB respects the individual use of these markings for names of organizations and businesses.

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