

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

*An independent forum for right whale conservation and recovery,
publishing several times each year.*

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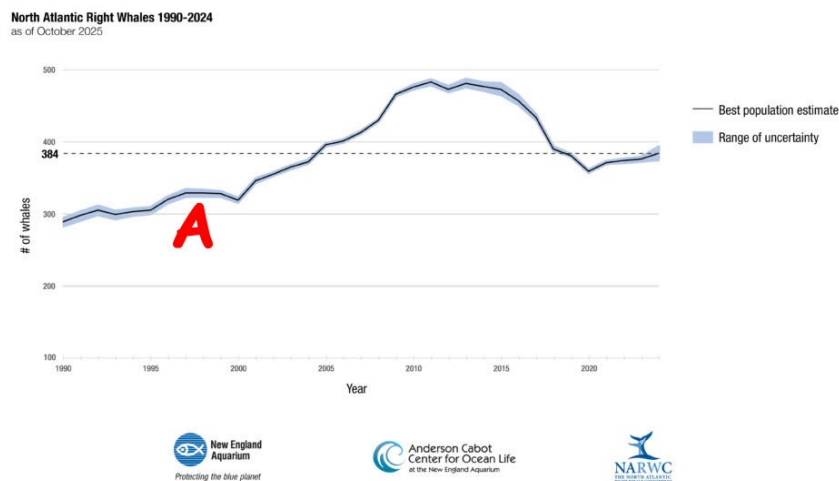
December 2025

The numbers, and the information resulting from dedicated monitoring, are pointing in a positive direction for the right whale population. This is described herein, as well as the efforts of diverse groups and organizations.

Ed.

Population Status: Continuing Promise

At the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium meeting in New Bedford, Massachusetts on 22 October, the numbers for the right whale population as of the end of 2024 were reported. The estimate was 384, an increase of 8 since the 2023 estimate.



Right whale population estimate through the end of 2024. Shaded area = area of uncertainty, greater in recent years. Current estimate 384 (+10/-9). The “A” indicates an area of several decades with a slow but steady population growth. Source: North Atlantic Right Whale

Consortium and National Marine Fisheries Service. The full report card will be found at narwc.org in January 2026.

This is the fourth year of modest population growth. Interestingly, this is about 2.1% increase, similar to that reported for several decades in the 1990s through 2010 (indicated by area A in the graph above). Overall, the numbers are improving, and reminiscent of past times. We are cautiously hopeful.

There is an additional source of information (below). A list of mother-calf pairs compiled by Jen Jakush for the SEUS Implementation team meeting on 23 May 2025 shows a) four first-time mothers, and b) four mothers with calving intervals of four years. Both numbers point back to area “A” on the graph above, when right whales experienced several decades of slow but steady growth, at about the 2–2.5% level. We await the results from the 2026 SEUS season.

2025 Mother-calf pairs

Whale Catalog #	Name	Age	# of calves	Years b/w calves
1145	Grand Teton	>44	9	4
2413	Nauset	31	5	4
2430	Minus One	>31	4	4
2460	Monarch	>31	5	4
3292	Cashew	23	3	10
3420	Platypus	21	2	10
3503	Caterpillar	20	0	-
3540	Black Heart	20	2	12
3705	Check Mark	18	0	-
4150	Accordion	>15	0	-
4540		12	0	-
				6.9 years

The rows outlined in red indicate calves born outside of the SEUS. For further information: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/north-atlantic-right-whale-calving-season-2025>

Aerial Surveys Underway in the SEUS

There are currently five aerial survey teams in the southeastern United States, extending from Virginia to Florida. These efforts are summarized in the table below.

Team		Team Leader	Start Date	
Virginia	Norfolk, VA	Jessica Ozog	November	May
North Carolina	Emerald I., NC	Renee LaGarenne	15 Nov	15 Apr
South Carolina	Pawley’s Island SC	Joelle Marchiani	15 Nov	15 Apr
Georgia	St. Simons Island, GA	Melanie White	01 Dec	31 Mar
Florida	St. Augustine, FL	Jen Jakush	01 Dec	31 Mar

The results from the SEUS season have begun. A number of individuals and pairs have been sighted off North Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. On 28 November the first mother-calf pair of the season, female #3904 with her second calf were reported off South Carolina. Subsequent days were windy with limited surveys. The weather turned favorable on 3 December with several sightings, including an additional mother-calf-pair, # 3520, Millipede, with her 3rd known calf. As of this date of the posting of the issue, the calf count stands at five.

In addition to the aerial surveys, shore-based volunteer sighting programs are being conducted by the Amelia Island Whale Ambassadors, the Marineland Right Whale Program, and the Blue World Research Institute.

Sighting dates and locations can be tracked on whalemap.org.

Leveraging Networked AIS Transceivers to Reduce Vessel Strike Risk for North Atlantic Right Whales

Contributed by Greg Reilly, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Savannah, Georgia

An innovative project by the Cape Cod-based company, MotionInfo, is deploying Automatic Identification System (AIS) units along the U.S. East Coast to improve vessel compliance with speed restrictions and dynamic management zones designed to protect North Atlantic right whales (motioninfo/stationkeeper). AIS is an industry standard collision avoidance system required for large commercial vessels worldwide. The system automatically transmits and receives vessel and voyage information to allow vessels to identify each other at sea. MotionInfo is deploying shore-based units that are networked and managed by computer software to automatically detect and message vessels operating in North Atlantic right whale habitat.

Network Status: As of 2025, over 50 AIS units are operational, with more than half installed on lighthouses. These installations provide continuous coverage in high-risk areas for vessel-whale interactions. IFAW, the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation, and the Georgia Conservancy are supporting the project through grant applications, fundraising, and public awareness.

System Design: AIS units are mounted on existing structures such as lighthouses (e.g., St. Augustine, Florida). This approach minimizes infrastructure requirements while maximizing signal range.

Onboard the vessels, no additional equipment is needed, as AIS has been mandatory for commercial vessels over 65 feet in length under U.S. law and International Maritime Organization (IMO) regulations since 2004.

The network is capable of sending near real-time alerts and electronic navigation data to notify mariners when they are entering a seasonal or dynamic management area, exceeding a regulated speed, and operating in the vicinity of recent cetacean observations or detections. MotionInfo's system can transmit thousands of targeted messages per month, using geofencing capabilities to send targeted messages directly to specific vessels. It also tracks message receipt and vessel actions after receiving messages.

The installation (see example below) sends digital messages within 20 miles/line-of-sight). The message lands on the vessel's navigation equipment, which is manually cleared. In turn, the vessel sends an automatic receipt.

Measuring Success: Effectiveness will be evaluated by measuring reductions in vessel speed within management zones, especially after receiving over speed and avoidance messages. This approach addresses the primary threat—vessel strikes—by improving compliance through direct, automated communication.

Looking Forward: Sustainment funding is yet to be secured but the network will be deployed and tested during this year's migration and calving season. A fully deployed network would

consist of approximately 130 stations from Florida to Maine. Its ability to deliver high-volume, location-specific information in real time, across multiple states, without overwhelming VHF voice communications, makes it a worthy candidate for sustained government funding.



An AIS installation installed at the top of the St. Augustine lighthouse. Messages advising of over speed and avoidance are sent to vessels within a 20-mile range, and acknowledgement of the message received. (Photos: T. McGinis).

Exhibit: Right Whales of Amelia Island

The Amelia Island Museum of History, 233 S. 3rd St., Fernandina Beach, Florida, will present Right Whales of Amelia Island, on 19 December 2025–5 April 2026. The exhibition is being created by the Amelia Island Whale Ambassadors (AIWA) in collaboration with their partners and sponsors.

The exhibit will open on 19 December as part of the museum's "3rd on 3rd" series with a presentation by Richard Timm and Scott Rowley of the AIWA. The evening's activities will begin at 6:00 p.m. Following the presentation, attendees will enjoy exclusive access to the exhibit along with complimentary appetizers and beverages. The suggested donation is \$5 for members, and \$10 for non-members. Seating is limited and on a first-come, first-served basis. The program is wheelchair accessible.

A second presentation will be at the museum on 20 February, at 6:00 p.m., again as part of the museum's "3rd on 3rd" series. Nick Williams, a local biologist who leads Whale Guard Bioacoustics Research Inc. and is the naturalist for the Ritz Carlton, will share information on the right whale related research that he is currently involved with.



AMELIA ISLAND
MUSEUM OF HISTORY
PRESENTS

Right Whales of Amelia Island
ENDANGERED ~ ELUSIVE ~ ESSENTIAL

December 19, 2025 – April 5, 2026

A special exhibition created
by the **Amelia Island Whale Ambassadors**



Save our Right Whales
...before they go extinct

The Museum is located
at 233 S. 3rd Street,
Fernandina Beach, FL 32034.
Open: Mon-Sat 10am-4pm,
Friday until 6pm,
& Sun 1pm-4pm

For a schedule of presentations, please scan this
QR code. For more information, contact Isabelle at
904.261.7378 x102 or Isabelle@ameliamuseum.org,
or visit <https://ameliamuseum.org/>

Image credit: Florida Fish
and Wildlife Conservation
Commission, taken under
NOAA permit #28919



Looking out from Amelia Island's beaches, the warm coastal waters of Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida host the only calving grounds for the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale. This exhibition traces their history—from centuries of exploitation to explores to their fragile hope-filled future.

A third presentation will be on 4 March, 12:00 p.m., as part of the museum's brown bag lunch series. Theresa Hartz of the AIWA will provide an update on the 2026 calving season, the lessons learned, and insights about individual whales.

To learn more, please access the museum’s website at <https://ameliamuseum.org/> or phone contact Isabelle Bournigault at Isabelle@AmeliaMuseum.org or at (904) 261-7378 ext. 102.

The AIWA are an active and lively group. They recently had a “baby shower” for the right whales (see RWN September 2024). Just recently, they celebrated the first mother calf sighting of the season—*Champagne*—with her second known calf.



AIWA team members, Carol Logan and Margie Banos celebrate the first mother of the season—Champagne—with her second known calf.

Three familiar items have been omitted from this issue: People and Changes, Calendar, and Scientific Literature and Reports. These items will return in the next issue.

Right Whale News

Right Whale News is a publication of Associated Scientists at Woods Hole. It is disseminated online through the courtesy of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. The Editor is Jim

Hain. The Editorial board consists of Julie Albert, Robert Kenney, Hans Neuhauser, and Amy Whitt. The current and back issues of *Right Whale News* published between 1994 and 2024 are available at the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium website, www.narwc.org, under the *Right Whale News* tab.

To submit ideas, article topics, and comments, contact Editor Jim Hain at jhain@earthlink.net and place “RWN Editorial” in the subject line. To subscribe, please use the “Mail Chimp” system at: <http://eepurl.com/JvmKf>. The link is also available via the *Right Whale News* tab on www.narwc.org.

Citing *Right Whale News*: The requested format for citations from *Right Whale News* is: Right Whale News Volume(number): page(s). Alternatively, a less formal citation may simply use month and year of issue.

An index to *Right Whale News*, subject and author, for the period 2004–2014 is posted at the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium website, www.narwc.org—under the *Right Whale News* tab. Indexing for the period 1994–2004 is underway.

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Jim Hain, Editor of *Right Whale News*, is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists.