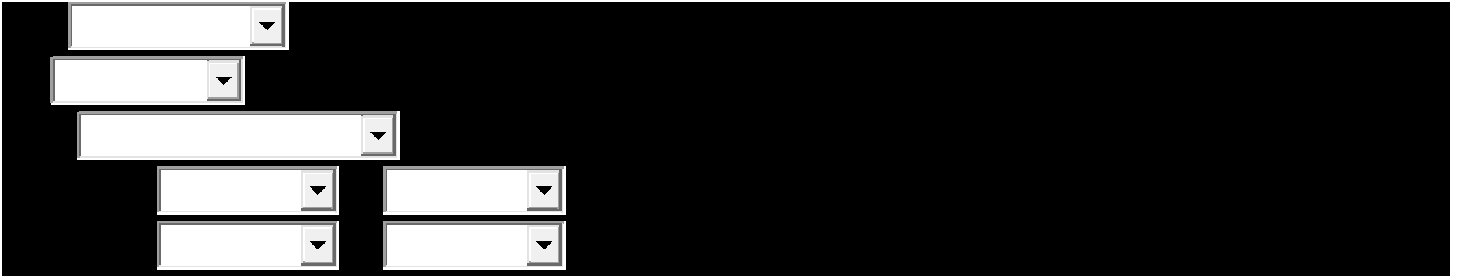


Hawaii's false killer whales still face threats to their survival, but a new study offers hope (video on the website)

<https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2018/11/20/hawaiis-endangered-false-killer-whales-still-face-threats-their-survival-new-study-offers-hope/>



Hawaii's false killer whales still face threats to their survival, but a new study offers hope

By [Jim Mendoza](#) | November 19, 2018 at 4:48 PM HST - Updated November 19 at 6:26 PM

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Researchers who track Hawaii's endangered false killer whales estimate 150 to 170 of the animals live in the waters around Hawaii.

"Up off Kohala, off of Lanai and north of Molokai — those are all hot spots for the animals," said Robin Baird, of Cascadia Research Collective.

The Washington-based organization studies the animals to map their movements and monitor their health.

"False killer whales have always been our highest priority species," Baird said.

Baird has studied the false killer whales since 2000, and said they face various threats — from entanglements in fishing nets to ingesting organic pollutants.

"Every adult male in the population that we've collected blubber biopsy samples from have levels of PCBs that are thought to be high enough to cause immunosuppression for the animals," he said.

But, he adds, there are positive signs the species is healthy.

For the first time, the scientists used a drone in their research and captured amazing footage and photographs.

Baird said the animals that were surveyed look well-fed.

"One of the things we were really happy to see, there were two small calves in the second group we encountered," he said.

That's important because false killer whales have low reproductive rates. A female bears one calf every six or seven years.

Scientists also flew the drone close enough to collect breath samples from the false killer whales as they surfaced and exhaled.

"We send those samples off to a lab in Seattle and they're going to look at what sort of microorganisms are living in its respiratory tract," Baird said.

Hawaii's false killer whale population was two to three times larger in the 1980s. The animals were listed as endangered in 2012.

This year, Cascadia Research conducted four separate surveys of Hawaii's false killer whales.

"They are probably the species that is most in need of conservation assistance," Baird said.

The next study will be in April.