

Your help is urgently sought to look out for tohora around New Zealand and to report sightings immediately to the Department of Conservation.

How you can help

If you see a tohora please report it to DOC as soon as possible. Calls can be made to the 0800 DOCHOTline, 0800 36 24 68.

If you can, please photograph the whales. Photos can be used to identify individual whales. The most useful shots are of:

- The left side of the head.
- The full length of the body, particularly showing any identifying marks.

Please also record and give DOC staff the following information:

- The date, time and location of the sighting (GPS coordinates if possible).
- The number of whales and whether any are calves.
- The direction they were travelling.
- Your contact details.

Identification photo of a tohora, left side of head.

Photo: Nic Vallance



*The Department of Conservation's Mission is:
To conserve New Zealand's natural and historic
heritage for all to enjoy now and in the future.*

*He āta whakaute, manaaki, me te tiaki ia
Papatuanuku ki Aotearoa kia ū tonu ai tōna
whakawaiūtanga hei oranga ngakau mō te tini te
mano ināianeī, āke tonu ake.*



Photo: DOC

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards or
conservation emergencies
For fire and search and rescue call 111

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Southern Right Whale, *Tohora* – sightings urgently sought



Photo: Kim Westerskov



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

How to identify a tohora

These whales can come very close to shore. Adults average 14-15m and newborn calves between 4.5 and 6m. Tohora are mostly black in colour and can easily be identified by lack of a dorsal fin, a V-shaped blowhole spray and white growths on their heads called callosities.

The pattern of callosities on each whale is different making it possible to identify individuals and to track their movements.

Why sightings are important

Tohora are a native migrant to New Zealand. During the breeding season in winter and spring, they are mostly found in the waters around the subantarctic Auckland and Campbell Islands but there are occasional sightings around mainland New Zealand.

It is possible the whales seen around New Zealand could be from a separate population to those found in subantarctic waters. If this is the case, it would make the population of whales visiting the mainland extremely rare and they could be in peril.

DOC needs to collect information to clarify whether the mainland population is a separate population.

How to approach a tohora

- Carefully approach whales from behind and parallel to them.
- Maintain a distance of 50m from whales.
- Operate your boat slowly – at “no wake” speed – and quietly.
- Tohora may approach your boat in which case you should slow down and stop.
- Manoeuvre your boat sensitively near whales. Do not obstruct their path, cut through a group or separate mothers from calves.
- Avoid sudden noises that could startle the animals.
- Aircraft should avoid flying directly over whales, keeping at least 150m away.



Photos: Kim Westerskov



Photo: Rob Suisted/Natures Pics Images



Photo: Nic Vallance



Photo: Paul Salvador