



## SUMMARY OF HUMPBACK WHALE CALFS

This document contains a summary of calfs encountered during the 2008 humpback whale season in Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga. Images and text © Tony Wu and Takaji Ochi as noted. For additional information contact Tony Wu.

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## INTRODUCTION

This 22-page document is a summary of the humpback whale calves that we ([Tony Wu](#) and [Takaji Ochi](#)) encountered between 05 August and 12 September 2008 in the Vava'u island group in the Kingdom of Tonga. The purpose of this document is to provide a record and reference for ourselves for future whale seasons in Tonga, and also to share this information with anyone else who takes an interest in humpback whales.

During the 2008 humpback season, we were able to document 16 calves (plus two additional calves that were probably different than the ones we definitively ID-ed). It is important to note that we only counted calves which we were able to observe for a reasonable period of time, with photographic and/or video footage to support our IDs.

## A FEW OBSERVATIONS

- 1) There were undoubtedly other calves that we either did not encounter, or for which we were unable to obtain sufficient photo/ video documentation.
- 2) During the 2007 season, we were able to identify 13-14 calves during the month of August 2007 (four weeks vs six weeks this year), using the same methodology we've used for this document. We did not however compile a written summary for 2007.
- 3) Included in the count of 16 calves are two unusually large calves (#5 Blade and #6 Yankee), which may either be calves from last year still unseparated from their moms when we found them, or perhaps calves born unusually early this season. We spotted what appeared to be two other large calves, but were unable to get photo/ video footage for ID purposes.
- 4) Also included are two calves (#8 Onbu-chan and #9 ET) from Toku Island, which is a small island 40km from the main Vava'u island group. This is the first year we've been able to visit Toku.
- 5) Based on the timeline on page 5, our calf sightings occurred in clusters. This may in part have been due to our schedule (we were unable to go out on the water during most weekends), or it may reflect some underlying pattern.
- 6) In some cases, we spotted several calves in close proximity to one another (i.e., #5 Blade and #6 Yankee intersected and may have socialised briefly. #14 Jet, #15 Fuli Fuli, and one other calf we were not able to identify were within eyesight of one another when we found them.)
- 7) Based on the timeline, it appears that Vava'u may be a stopping area for calves. In other words, rather than calves being born and raised in the area, then travelling to the Antarctic, calves may be born in Vava'u, then move on, or be born elsewhere and visit Vava'u briefly before moving on. We only came across a few calves more than once, and the longest period between any two sightings for any single calf was 16 days.
- 8) On the timeline on page 5, we've noted prevailing moon and weather conditions. At this stage, it's not possible to conclude whether there's a correlation between calf sightings and climate/ moon phases, but perhaps over the next several years, some pattern may emerge.

## SUMMARY OF HUMPBACK WHALES CALFS

### VAVA'U, KINGDOM OF TONGA (05 AUG-12 SEPT 2008)

#	NAME	DATES/ LOCATIONS SIGHTED	DESCRIPTION
1	Scratches	19 August, between Mounu and Sisia; 20 August near Tu'ungasika	Unique scratch patterns on its mother's fluke
2	White Stripe	21 August, near Lua; 22 August, between Ovaka and Submarine Rock	White stripes on the dorsal side of its posterior region, between the dorsal fin and tail
3	Scar	21 August, next to Ovaka; also 5 August near Euakafa, but not clearly ID-able at the time	Two vertical scars on its right side, just posterior and dorsal to its pectoral fin
4	Buzz	26 August, near Richards Patches	Two white patches on mom's right side and scratches on right pec. Three escorts, one blowing bubbles constantly, another singing while swimming.
5	Blade	27 August, near Maninita	Unusually large calf, distinct, sharp, white-edged dorsal fin
6	Yankee	27 August, near Maninita	Mom all black with all white pectoral fins, the classic northern-hemisphere look
7	Tiny	27 August, near Luahiapo	Named for its small size compared to the other calfs I found on the same day
8	Onbu-chan	27 August, at Toku Island	Named for its tendency to position itself on mom's back (Onbu in Japanese means piggy-back)
9	ET	27 August, at Toku Island	Named for the alien-like appearance of the escort (possibly a hybrid of two species?)
10	Hokuto	28 August, next to Kitu	Single spot on left side of body (Hokuto means North Star in Japanese)
11	Lightning McQueen	28 August, near Maninita	Lightning-bolt-like white scar or birthmark under the right side of its dorsal fin
12	Chico	29 August, near Swallows Cave	Both mom and baby have whitish pectoral fins
13	Val	05 Sept, between Swallows Cave and Ava; 07 Sept, between Ovaka and Vaka'eitu; 08 Sept, south of Euakafa; 09 Sept, near Euakafa	White spot on left side of dorsal, white line across base of right side of dorsal, prominent circular mark left side of body



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#	NAME	DATES/ LOCATIONS SIGHTED	DESCRIPTION
14	Jet	09 September, near Submarine Rock	Named for unique manner in which the calf waited near its mom until it seemed as if it could no longer hold its breath, then rocketed to the surface for air. This contrasts with normal relaxed pace with which calfs surface. Had many remoras.
15	Fuli Fuli	09 September, near Submarine Rock	Dark body, primarily black with few immediately recognisable marks. Mom has white patch on both sides. Named for tendency to sashay around (Fuli Fuli means "move with a swinging motion" in Japanese). Also, Fuli Fuli sounds like Uli Uli, which is Tongan for "black". Named mom Kuru Kuru, for her tendency to turn around and swim back to take a look at us (Kuru Kuru means "around and around" in Japanese)
16	Chibi-chan	12 September, White Patch/ North Bay	Very small baby, perhaps just days old. Both mom and baby have distinctive white patterns on sides, with area around mom's eye being half white. "Chibi" means tiny in Japanese.
	Possible-1	13 August, south of Ovaka	Mom has a white scar just under dorsal fin on right side. Escort was highly inquisitive, approaching closely to people in the water.
	Possible-2	11 September, south of Mounu.	Mother and calf separated by up to four males. Mom and males went on high-speed heat run toward Fua'amotu. After ID-ing one of the males underwater and a long ensuing pursuit, we plus four other boats reunited mom and baby southeast of Fua'amotu. There were still two males with the mom, and they continued heading south. No photos of this one.

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## VAVA'U, KINGDOM OF TONGA (05 AUG-12 SEPT 2008)

### ID TIMELINE

01 Aug: New Moon	5 Aug: Scar
	13 Aug: Possible-1, calf with aggressive escort
16 Aug: Full Moon	
19 Aug: Rainy	19 Aug: Scratches 20 Aug: Scratches 21 Aug: White Stripe, Scar
23-24 Aug: Rainy	26 Aug: Buzz 27 Aug: Blade, Yankee, Tiny, Onbu-chan, ET 28 Aug: Hokuto, Lightning McQueen 29 Aug: Chico
30 Aug: New Moon	
29 Aug-04 Sept: Rainy, with bad storms (lightning, thunder, hail) 03-04 Sept.	05 Sept: Val
Constantly strong winds from late Aug until we left Tonga. Windiest conditions I've experienced.	07 Sept: Val 08 Sept: Val 09 Sept: Val, Jet, Fuli Fuli
	11 Sept: Possible-2, calf separated from mother 12 Sept: Chibi-chan
15 Sept: Full Moon	

## 1. SCRATCHES

We came across Scratches in poor visibility, and there were other boats that had been with this mother and calf for much of the day, so we did not spend much time with Scratches.

The easiest way to distinguish this pair is the mom's unique fluke, which is small and rounded off (as opposed to long and wide), with scratch-like markings all around the dorsal edges.

The calf has whitish pectoral fins and a unique squiggly mark above its right pectoral fin.

**When & Where:** 19 Aug, between Mounu and Sisia; 20 Aug, near Tu'ungasika







## 2. WHITE STRIPE

This calf is easy to recognise, both from the boat and underwater. It has white stripes along both sides of the dorsal surface of its caudal

region. We came across this calf two days in a row, once in really bad visibility, and again in an area with much better visibility.

**When & Where:** 21 Aug, near Lua; 22 Aug, between Ovaka and Submarine Rock



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### 3. SCAR

Scar has two easily recognisable vertical marks just above the right pectoral fin, and also has a rather pointed dorsal fin.

Mom's fluke is wide and medium thickness, no particular distinguishing marks.

#### **When & Where:**

21 Aug, near Lua; also on 05 Aug, near Euakafa, but not clearly ID-able at the time



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#### 4. BUZZ

We weren't able to get good ID photos of the baby, as Buzz and mom were accompanied by three escorts, one of which blew bubbles

constantly, another of which sang (vocalised) while swimming. Mom is easily recognised by the two white patches above her right pec, and

the scratch-like marks on her right pectoral fin.

**When & Where:** 26 Aug, near Richard's Patches

## 5. BLADE

One of two unusually large calfs found near Maninita. They were playing with a pod of spinner dolphins when we came across them. Calf above mom in top right photo.

Both mother and calf have distinctive dorsal fin markings, with Blade being named for sharp edge of dorsal fin.

### **When & Where:**

27 Aug, near Maninita



Blade's dorsal fin (left), mom's dorsal fin (right)





## 6. YANKEE

Another unusually large calf, most easily identified by mom's all-white pectoral fins. Yankee and mom were accompanied by an

escort that kept them moving at high speed. This trio appeared to cross paths and intermingle with Blade and mom.

**When & Where:** 27 Aug, near Maninita





## 7. TINY

There was a storm moving in when we found Tiny. Dark clouds, low light, gusting winds and intermittent rain made it difficult to spot the calf.

There was an escort pushing mom and baby along at a rapid pace, and the visibility underwater was poor.

This is the only photo we have, though we have

video which shows the calf more clearly.

The easiest feature to make out on the mother is the ragged edge of her fluke, with somewhat of a “W” pattern near the edge of her right fluke. Her pronounced, sharp dorsal fin is also a good reference point.

The calf has some scratch-like marks on its fluke and somewhat of a

white leading edge on its right pectoral fin.

**When & Where:** 27 Aug, near Luahiapo



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## 8. ONBU-CHAN

We named this calf Onbu-chan for its tendency to ride on its mom's back. "Onbu" means piggy-back in Japanese.

Onbu-chan has white-ended pectoral fins, and both mom and calf have hooked dorsal fins.

**When & Where:** 27 Aug, Toku Island (40km north of Vava'u)





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## 9. ET

ET is named for its strange-looking escort. It has an elongated torso and shortened snout more like other baleen whales such as sei and

blue whales (possible hybrid?). ET's mom has a hooked dorsal. ET has white-ended pectoral fins.

**When & Where:** 27 Aug, Toku Island (40km north of Vava'u)





## 10. HOKUTO

Several other boats passed this mother and calf by without noticing them, as they were quiet and had long intervals between breaths. Mom

was quite shy, wary of people in the water. ("North Star" in Japanese) is named for a prominent single spot on its left torso.

**When & Where:** 28 Aug, next to Kitu





## 11. LIGHTNING MCQUEEN

We named this calf for the unique lightning-bolt like mark on the right side of its body, just under the dorsal fin. Mom's dorsal is nondescript.

There was an escort, and the whales moved too quickly for us to get in and take underwater photos.

### **When & Where:**

28 Aug, near Maninita







## 12. CHICO

Chico is our 12th calf of this season. Chico and mom were in the midst of a heat run with several other whales all around them.

There was a lot of frenzied activity, which kept Chico and mom swimming at a fast pace.

Both Chico and mom have white-ended pectoral fins.

**When & Where:** 29 Aug,  
near Swallows Cave





### 13. VAL

The prominent white spot on the left side of the dorsal fin and the white stripe across the base of the right side of the dorsal fin make Val easy to recognise.

Val, mom and escort breached and played often.

#### **When & Where:**

05 Sept, between Swallows Cave and Ava, 07 Sept, between Ovaka and Vaka'eitu; 08 Sept, south of Euakafa; 09 Sept, near Euakafa



Val's dorsal fin, left and right sides



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## 14. JET

Jet had the unusual habit of waiting until the last second to rocket up to the surface to breath.

The calf has three circular marks on the right side of its body just below the dorsal fin. Mom has a small white patch near her eyes.

### **When & Where:**

09 Sept, near  
Submarine Rock  
(close proximity to  
Fuli Fuli)



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## 15. FULI FULI

Hesitant at first, but very playful mom and calf once they grew accustomed to us. Mom kept turning around and swimming toward us, so we named her “Kuru Kuru” which means “around and around” in Japanese.

### When & Where:

09 Sept, near  
Submarine Rock  
(close proximity to  
Jet)



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## 16. CHIBI-CHAN

A very young calf that we swam with on the last day of our stay this year. Mom easily identified by white areas on either side of torso.

Note that the calf also has similar white areas. “Chibi” means “tiny” in Japanese.

**When & Where:** 12 Sept, White Patch/ North Bay



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## POSSIBLE-1

We were unable to get good underwater photos of this calf and its mother underwater, due in part to the presence of a highly inquisitive

escort. Mom is easily recognised by the white line under the right side of her dorsal fin.

**When & Where:** 13 Aug, south of Ovaka