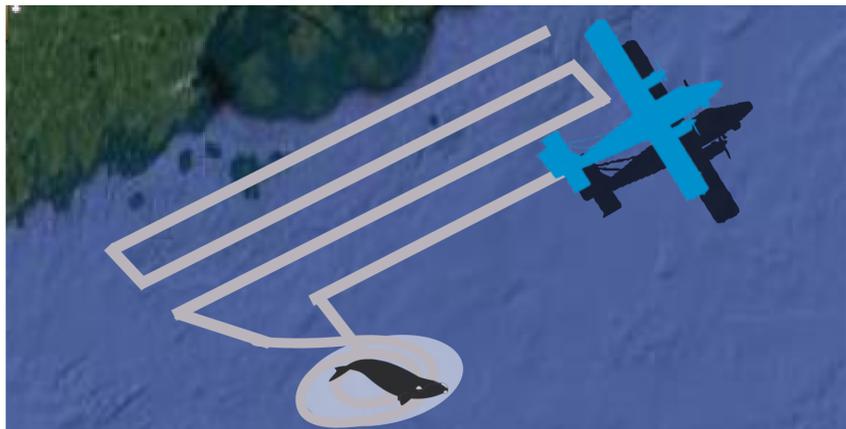


Tracking North Atlantic Right Whales from the Sky

North Atlantic right whales are one of the most endangered species in the world. NOAA Fisheries biologists and aerial observers at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Wood Hole, Massachusetts, fly in the NOAA Twin Otter aircraft across the Gulf of Maine looking for right whales to help protect them.



DID YOU KNOW?

Aerial surveys are an important way to track and protect right whales. Observers fly in linear patterns to spot these whales. When they locate one, they fly in circles to collect data.

OBSERVER AERIAL SURVEY FACTS

When conducting aerial surveys, observers:

- ✓ Scan waters to detect the location of whales and collect environmental, spatial, and behavioral data.
- ✓ Spend 6+ hours per day/year-round in the aircraft. They often refuel and conduct multiple surveys in one day.
- ✓ Take photographs to identify individual whales to monitor their health status and track the size of the population.
- ✓ Sometimes drop sonobuoys from the aircraft when a whale is spotted in order to record real-time acoustics of the whale.

HOW NOAA FISHERIES USES AERIAL OBSERVER DATA

Under a federal scientific research permit, observers collect critical information from aerial surveying, such as the presence of animals, pictures of animals, and environmental data, needed to inform management actions aimed at protecting endangered species like the right whale.

TAKING ACTION

Right whales detected!

NOAA sends alerts so vessels can take precautions, as regulations prohibit approaches within 1,500ft of right whales.

No faster than 10 knots

North Atlantic Right Whale Statistics

~400

are estimated remaining as of 2020

~4%

of the population died starting in 2017, which necessitated an Unusual Mortality Event declaration

>70%

of the time, mom/calf pairs rest at or near the surface

~100

breeding females in the population

90%

of their lifetime is typically spent below the surface, making them difficult to find

