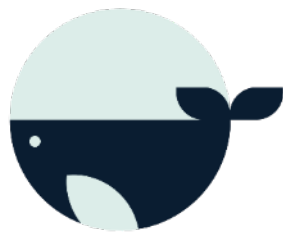


2025 SEASON ACTIVITY REPORT

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Navigating
Whale
Habitat

Canadian East Coast Sector

Prepared by:



In collaboration with:



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada



SLGO
St. Lawrence
Global Observatory



SAGUENAY-ST. LAWRENCE
MARINE PARK
Canada Québec

ABOUT

The North Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of St. Lawrence and its Estuary, represents a key migration corridor and critical habitat for several species of whales, some of which are at risk, such as the blue whale, the fin whale, the North Atlantic right whale and the St. Lawrence beluga. It is also a major shipping corridor and a region brimming with a wide range of human activities that are essential in many regards, notably for the economic development of certain coastal communities. Inevitably, these activities have impacts on any whales that cross their path.

The Marine Mammal Observation Network (MMON) and its partners are working together with the different user categories in the St. Lawrence to promote a harmonious coexistence with whales. One of the initiatives that has been launched is an educational platform to promote responsible boating and shipping called *Navigating Whale Habitat* (NWH). The platform features portals for different user groups in the St. Lawrence that contain tools and references that these groups can use to contribute to whale conservation in the Northwest Atlantic. The voluntary documentation of marine mammal sightings is one of the actions advocated to encourage users of the St. Lawrence to play an active role in whale conservation. MMON oversees a network of volunteer observer members including a number of ship operators, ferries and organizers of marine observation activities that collect observation data on the whales and seals they encounter in the course of their activities. Citizens are also encouraged to participate in the program.

This report presents an overview of activities conducted between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026, as part of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program, which aims to compile valuable information on the presence of whales in key shipping areas and to train seafarers, fishers, whale-watching companies and the general public in whale identification and conservation.

An MMON initiative, the project is being carried out in collaboration with a large number of partners such as the St. Lawrence Global Observatory, Green Marine, GREMM, Sépaq, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Additionally, representatives of the various user categories of the St. Lawrence actively participate in working committees created to develop the tools of the program. We are extremely grateful to all our partners and collaborators for their invaluable feedback, which is essential for us to design tools that are properly suited to their respective realities.

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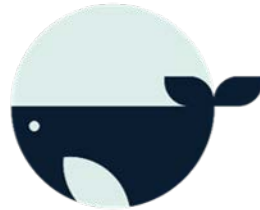
The *Navigating Whale Habitat* program is made possible in part thanks to funding received under Fisheries and Oceans Canada's *Habitat Stewardship Program* (HSP) for Aquatic Species at Risk and *Oceans Management Contribution Program*.

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PART 1 • MMON ACTIVITY REPORT



Navigating
Whale
Habitat

1.1. PROJECT HISTORY

The Marine Mammal Observation Network (MMON) is a non-profit organization that has been working for the conservation and promotion of the St. Lawrence River and its fauna since 1998. With its integrated management approach, the organization collaborates with various users of the St. Lawrence to involve them in a coordinated effort to preserve marine ecosystems.

Ever since it was founded, MMON has overseen a network of volunteer observer members that gather data on whales and seals. Having grown significantly in recent years, this network has expanded to include (in addition to the maritime industry involved since 2015) conservation parks, whale-watching companies, expedition cruise operators as well as institutional players (government entities and educational establishments) and the research community. Since 2022, all of these contributions have been presented in a single report and compiled in a common database. This mobilization is further augmented by that of citizens, whose involvement remains significant with data collected throughout the year. Citizen-sourced data enrich the program's database and complement observations documented by program members, which are optimized

for public viewing by the visualization tool. Lastly, the data entry application has benefited from several improvements over the past year thanks to funding from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Aquatic Species at Risk, which has funded the program's stewardship projects since they were first launched in 2015, will continue to provide support for the next two years (2026 and 2027). As a result, it will be possible to continue supporting members in an effort to maintain their enthusiasm for documenting the marine mammals that cross their paths. This activity report describes the upgrades made to the *Navigating Whale Habitat* (NWH) program and the involvement of observer members and citizens in collecting marine mammal observation data throughout 2025.

1.2. GENERAL COORDINATION

The maritime industry is in its 11th year of involvement in the *Navigating Whale Habitat* training and data collection program. The program is now running smoothly, with over a dozen active members in this user category participating annually.

Also part of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* participatory science program is the Sentinels of the St. Lawrence project, a lever designed to enhance existing initiatives of MMON and its partners for protecting at-risk whale species by expanding the temporal and spatial coverage of such initiatives, namely through awareness activities in the field and on various distribution platforms.

The project helps foster a better understanding of the issues related to the protection of species at risk, promote

responsible behaviour (including observation from land-based sites or platforms already on the water such as ferries), and stimulate data collection in the form of reporting marine mammal observations. To ensure the coherence, complementarity, and effectiveness of the actions deployed, MMON has established a coordination committee responsible for monitoring the project's progress, harmonizing messaging, and supporting the development of awareness-raising tools. This committee is composed of representatives from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Parks Canada, Sépaq (Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park management unit), and the Group for Research and Education on Marine Mammals (GREMM), thereby fostering a collective approach and the success of existing initiatives for the benefit of at-risk species.



During the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the committee met on two occasions to follow up on the project's implementation: in July 2025 and January 2026. The first meeting revolved around the achievements of the pilot project and planning for the 2025 season, particularly with regard to the summer tour, awareness-raising tools, and the communications plan.

The second meeting focused on a review of the 2025 season, evaluating completed activities, and ongoing tool development, including the mapping of shore-based observation sites. Regular email exchanges throughout the year also helped validate various tools and coordinate activities.



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Canada

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Canada

1.3.A COMPREHENSIVE TOOLKIT FOR PROGRAM MEMBERS

One of the issues raised by the maritime industry early in the project (2015) was where to find and how to consult information on whale conservation as it relates to this sector. Likewise, one of the program's objectives was to create a neutral, web-based platform that would serve as a one-stop reference for issues relating to navigating whale habitat in eastern Canadian waters. The online platform is divided into five portals: the first one for ship operators, the second one for recreational boaters, the third for fishers and the fourth for the whale-watching industry. A fifth portal was launched in March 2025 to educate citizens on various actions that can be taken to support the recovery of at-risk whales. On each of their respective portals, the different user categories can find key messages from organizations and ministries responsible for whale conservation as well as a number of tools developed under their respective program.

Designed by SLGO, the *Navigating Whale Habitat* website has been online since spring 2020 at www.navigationbaleines.ca/en/home/. The website – including all training and awareness-raising tools – was officially launched in

May 2021 for ship operators, February 2023 for fishers and July 2024 for whale-watching companies. Recreational boaters and members of the general public who consult the online platform are also encouraged to contribute to citizen data collection.

The following sections describe the efforts made throughout the 2025-2026 fiscal year to develop tools for the *Navigating Whale Habitat* platform.

Continuous Improvement of Online Platform Portals

Throughout the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the platform's portals were continually upgraded to support the evolution of the program. These updates aimed to facilitate the site's annual maintenance, integrate new members participating in data collection and enhance the visibility of tools that were made available to them, including the *Vigie Marine* data entry application. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to optimize the user experience while setting the stage for the structural improvements to the data entry and visualization tools detailed in the following section.

Screenshot of online portal home page showing the addition of the yellow banner dedicated to citizen science for the conservation of at-risk whale species



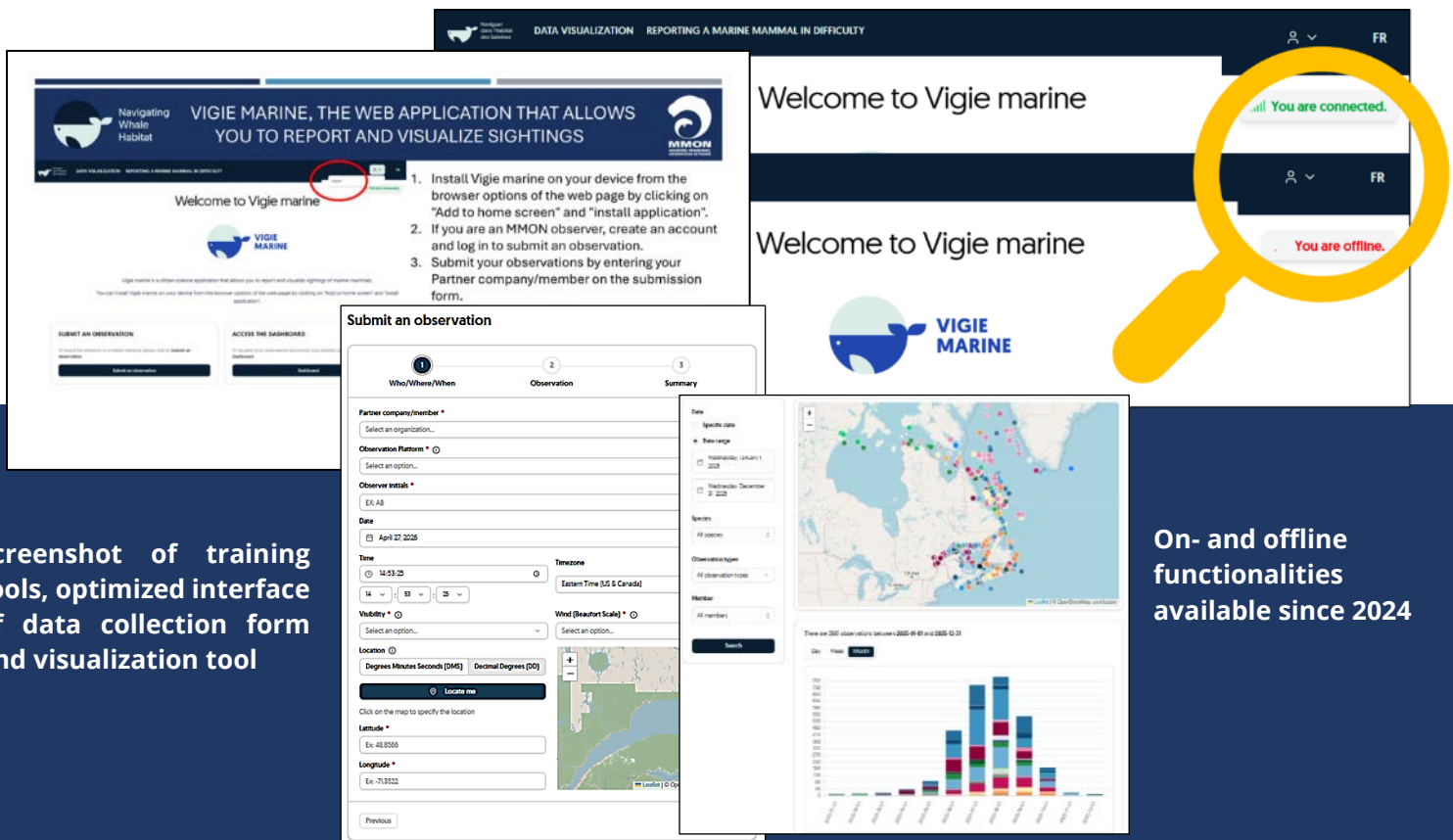
Optimization of Data Entry and Visualization Tools

In recent years, the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program has relied on the development and consolidation of digital tools designed to structure and improve the collection of marine mammal observation data. The ***Vigie Marine* data entry** and ***visualization tool***, which is built into the online platform, is now a central pillar of the program, both for observer members and citizens (fishers, recreational boaters and the general public). This streamlines data management while improving access and optimization.

In 2025-2026, user support remained a priority in order to support the adoption and use of *Vigie Marine*. Once again, trainings were provided both for observer members and as part of citizen

science activities. These trainings were an opportunity to consolidate best practices for logging data and to answer questions from the users. The switch to *Vigie Marine* has been a gradual one: Some members are already fully proficient in the tool while others continue to prefer reporting their sightings on paper. MMON will continue its support efforts to further promote the use of the platform while maintaining options suited to the realities of certain data collectors.

In this regard, *Vigie Marine* has benefited over the years from several improvements aiming to simplify the data entry process, improve the user-friendliness of forms and support data collection in sectors lacking Internet coverage with offline functionality. Based on user feedback, these adjustments have helped harmonize the data entry fields and remove a number of seldom used features, thus laying the groundwork for a more structural redesign of the tool.



The screenshot displays the *Vigie Marine* web application interface. It includes a 'Welcome to Vigie marine' message, a 'You are connected.' status indicator (highlighted with a yellow magnifying glass), and a 'You are offline.' status indicator. The interface features a 'Submit an observation' form with fields for Partner company/member, Observation Platform, Observer initials, Date, Time, Timezone, Visibility, Wind (Beaufort Scale), Location (Latitude/Longitude), and a map. A 'Submit' button is visible. To the right, a map shows the distribution of sightings, and a bar chart displays the number of observations by date. The text 'On- and offline functionalities available since 2024' is present in the bottom right corner.

Vigie Marine Redesign and New Features

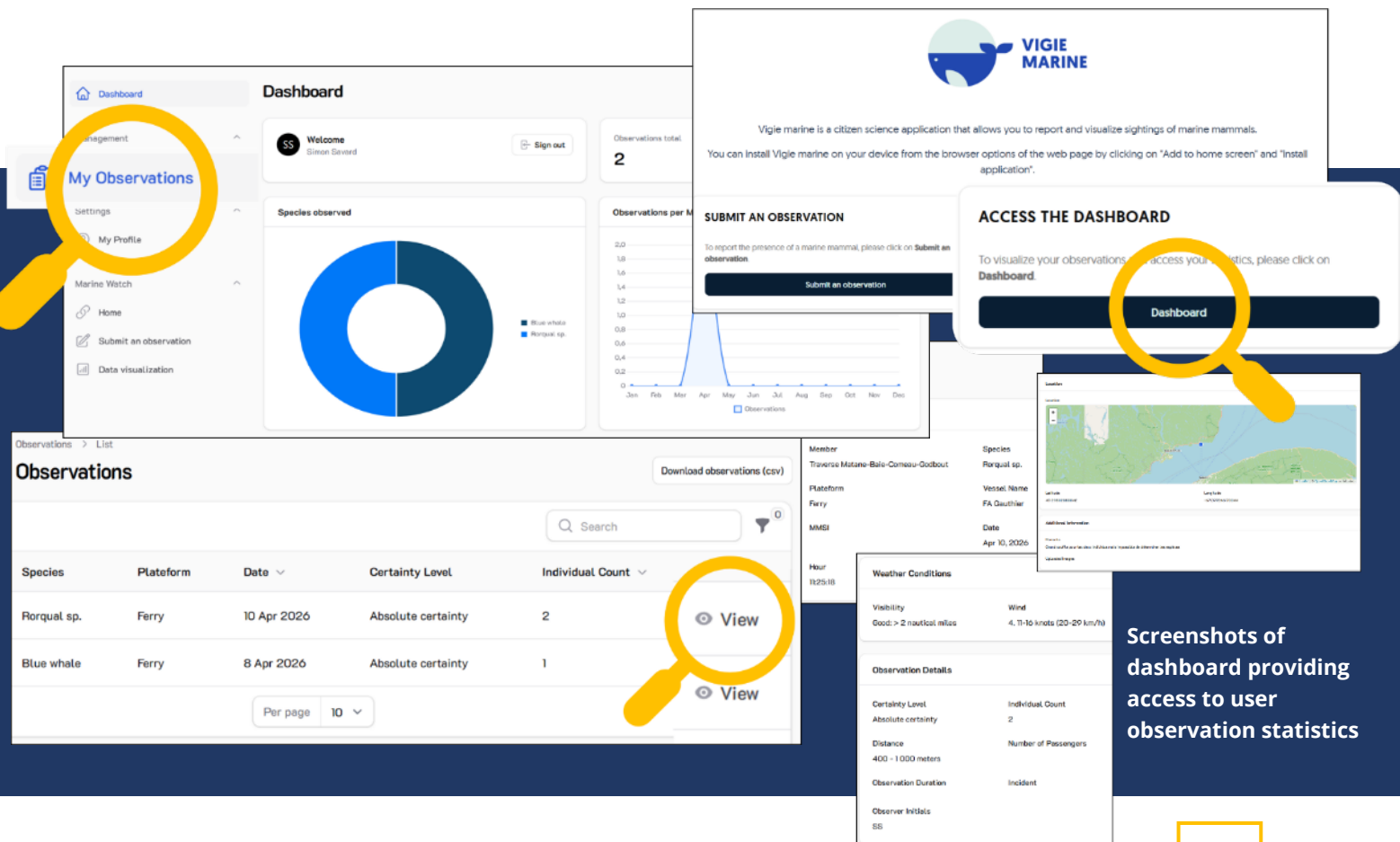
In 2025-2026, *Vigie Marine* underwent a major overhaul by a specialized firm that helped modernize the tool's architecture, ensure its long-term viability and improve its overall performance. The application now offers two distinct forms—one for citizens and the other for observer members—and features on- and offline data entry modes.

Among the more notable improvements, the optimization now offers observer members and citizens a personalized user space, including a dashboard providing access to their observation statistics. Users can now visualize the observation data they entered into *Vigie Marine* and download them directly from the app. Partners may also download any of the program's data for scientific monitoring and management purposes. These new features enhance observer

feedback and strengthen their involvement in the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program while at the same time helping to optimize collected data for project partners.



Lastly, the redesign laid the groundwork for more autonomous user and data management, facilitating the addition or removal of observer members while improving the platform's security and stability. These improvements support the objectives of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program by fostering increased participation, greater user uptake of the tool, and increasingly efficient and structured data collection.



The image displays several screenshots of the Vigie Marine application interface, highlighting new features and user statistics.

Dashboard Overview: The dashboard includes a welcome message, a sign-out button, and a summary of observations. A donut chart shows the species observed: Blue whale (1) and Rorqual sp. (2). A line graph displays observations per month from January to December.

Navigation Menu: A magnifying glass highlights the 'My Observations' link in the sidebar menu.

Submit an Observation: A button labeled 'Submit an observation' is shown.

Access the Dashboard: A button labeled 'Dashboard' is highlighted with a magnifying glass.

Observations List: A table lists observations with columns for Species, Platform, Date, Certainty Level, and Individual Count. A magnifying glass highlights the 'View' button next to each entry.

Observation Details: A detailed view of an observation for Rorqual sp. on a Ferry on April 10, 2026, at 19:25:18. It includes weather conditions, observation details, and observer information.

Species Observed: A donut chart showing the distribution of species observed: Blue whale (1) and Rorqual sp. (2).

Observations per Month: A line graph showing the number of observations per month from January to December.

Download observations (csv): A button to download the observation data as a CSV file.

Search: A search bar to filter observations.

Per page: A dropdown menu to select the number of items per page (currently set to 10).

Weather Conditions: A section displaying weather data for the observation location.

Observation Details: A section displaying detailed information about the observation, including certainty level, individual count, distance, number of passengers, observation duration, and incident.

Observer Information: A section displaying the observer's name, email, and phone number.

Screenshots of
dashboard providing
access to user
observation statistics

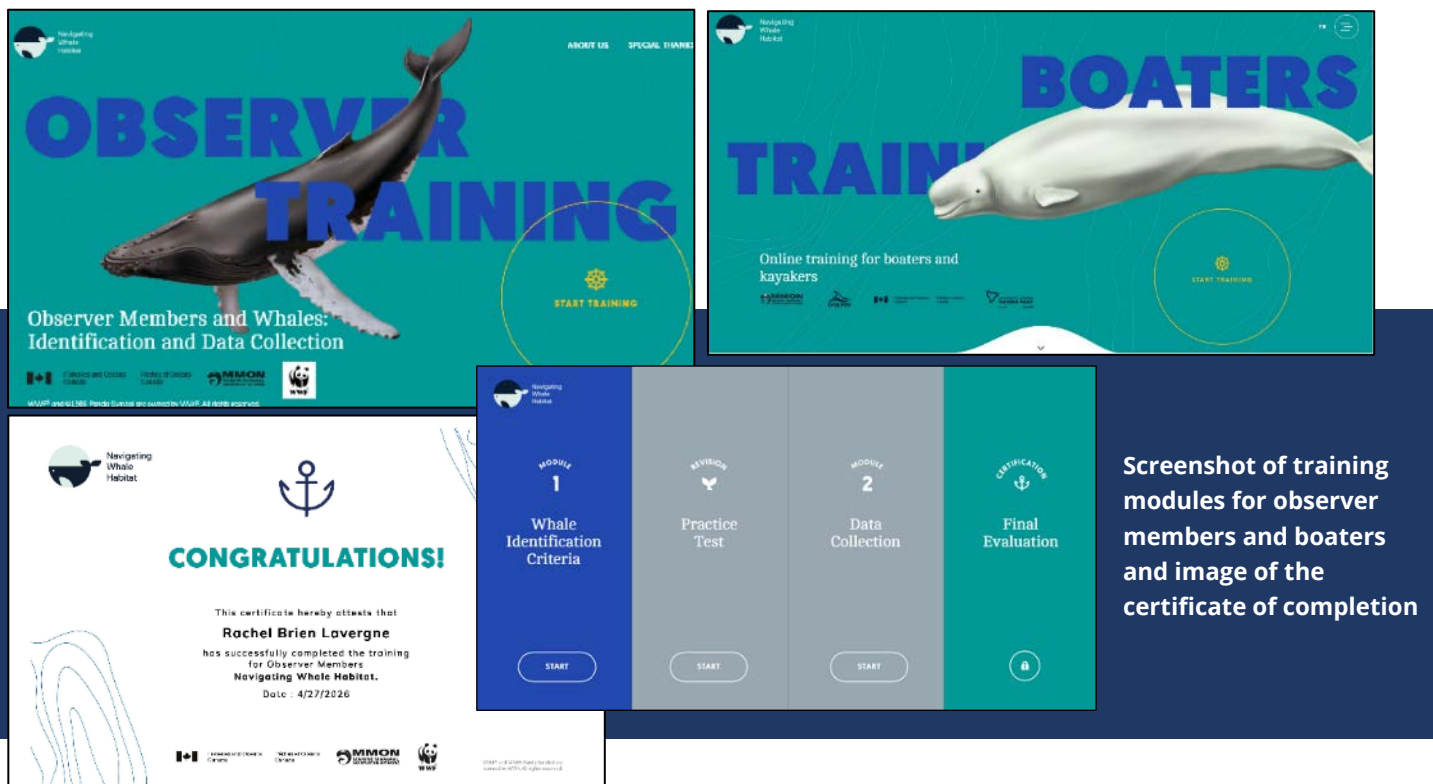
Online Training

Since the Navigating Whale Habitat program was first launched, trainings have been gradually adapted to meet the diverse needs of users of the St. Lawrence and their operational realities. Following an initial phase focused on in-person training by MMON biologists, the development of online self-study modules has supported continuing education while ensuring consistent information sharing across the region.

The online platform now includes several specialized training courses that can be accessed through the portals created for ship operators, fishers, the whale-watching industry, and citizens (recreational boaters). The training courses for ship operators and the fishing community cover topics such as whale species identification, collecting observation data, and best navigation practices. Offered in French and

English, these courses include an assessment leading to a certificate of completion for participants who achieve a minimum score of 70%. These trainings are available both [online](#) and in a [downloadable](#) version for offline use, as well as in a format compatible with certain learning management systems (LMS).

The platform also hosts training and awareness content tailored to boaters and the general public. Developed in collaboration with GREMM, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, [boater training](#) aims to inform boaters about the potential impacts of their activities, current regulations, and how best to conduct oneself in the presence of whales. The citizen portal offers educational content that promotes species identification and citizen science. Together, these training programs enhance user knowledge while promoting a more harmonious coexistence with marine mammals in the St. Lawrence.



Stewardship Guides

In the context of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program, MMON has produced a series of guides over the years that aim to educate the various users of the St. Lawrence on best practices when operating in whale habitat in the waters of eastern Canada. These guides also include identification sheets for marine species (whales, turtles, sharks, seals) that mariners may encounter during their activities.

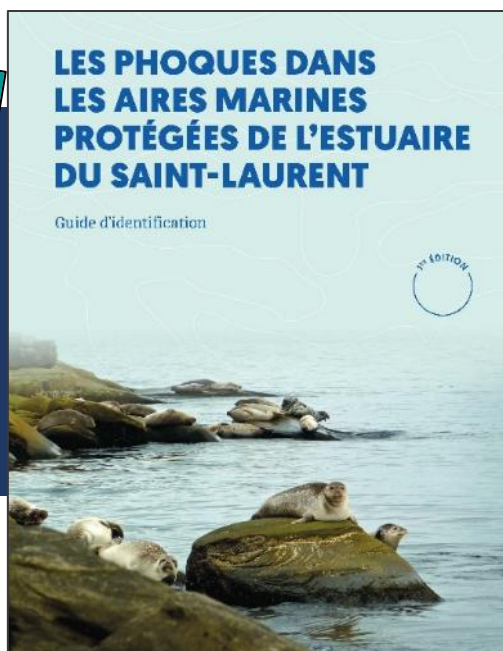
The first guide – produced in 2014 in collaboration with the Maritime Federation of Canada and updated in 2019 with the World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF Canada) – is intended for shipping companies and addresses issues related to whale collisions as well as waterway sectors that warrant extra caution. On the heels of this initiative, a second guide, published in 2022 with WWF Canada and M-Expertise Marine, was designed for fishers. It addresses the risks of entanglement, the factors that influence them, and mitigation solutions, notably drawing on innovations developed by the fishing industry. A third guide,

this time aimed at whale-watching companies and completed in winter 2024, presents best practices for observing marine mammals, the potential impacts of such activities, and the role that users can play in conservation.

In addition to this series, a new **seal identification guide for marine protected areas in the St. Lawrence Estuary** (in French) was published in 2025. This tool aims to facilitate the identification of pinnipeds present in the estuary while educating users on appropriate behaviours to minimize disturbance and foster their conservation, notably by collecting data with the *Vigie Marine* app. Although this guide was developed with funding from Quebec's Ministry of the Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks (MELCCFP), it also incorporates stewardship messages from MMON's partners within the framework of the Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP). It has also been reviewed by members of the coordination committee, including Parks Canada and Sépaq, and is available online on the NWH platform's [whale watcher's portal](#).



The PDF versions of these guides can be downloaded from the different portals of the online platform. Hard copies are available upon request by emailing info@romm.ca.

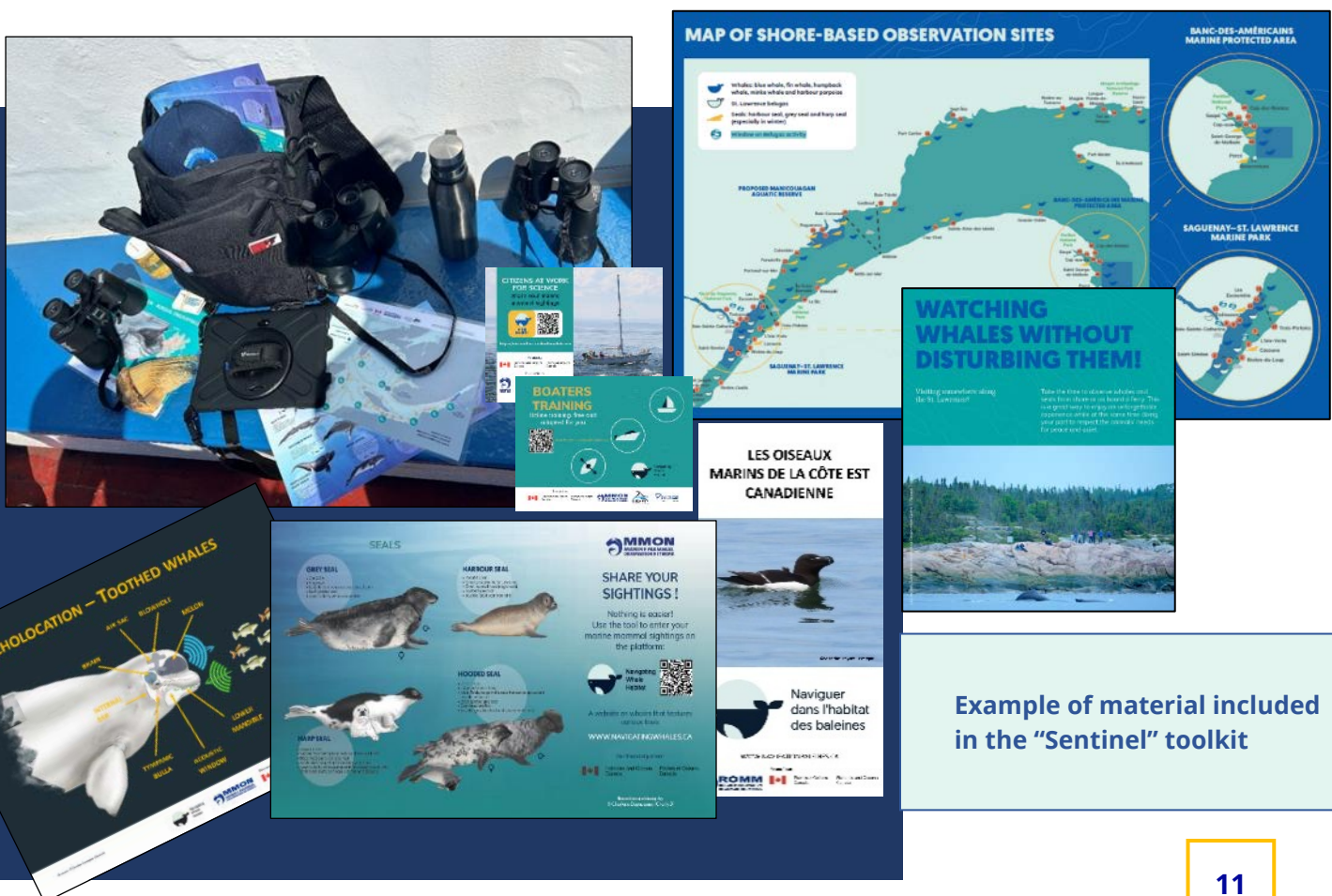


Toolkits

Toolkits are also being developed and distributed to participants of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* training and data collection program. Adapted to each user category, these toolkits consist of pocket folders with the project logo and notably include data collection protocols, information sheets on whales, sharks and turtles, as well as other reference tools related to the participants' respective activities. The ship operator's and fisher's toolkits are continuously distributed as a complement to the stewardship guides designed for these groups. More elaborate educational kits—designed for the whale-watching industry and including an interpretive manual, laminated fact sheets on different topics, and various visual aids—were also deployed beginning in summer 2024 in the St. Lawrence Estuary, the Côte-Nord region and the Gaspé Peninsula.

In 2025, the official launch of the Sentinels of the St. Lawrence project led to the use of specific toolkits for summer outreach activities. These kits notably contain mobile interpretive equipment (tablets), binoculars for use from shore or aboard ferries, small replicas of different species of whales and seals, thematic fact sheets, objects representing the diet of baleen whales, as well as various promotional tools related to the Navigating Whale Habitat platform and the *Marine Vigie* app.

Additionally, a new map of shore-based marine mammal observation sites has been added to the citizen's portal of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* platform. This map promotes responsible whale and seal watching by identifying sites that are accessible from shore and ferries. A pamphlet featuring this map will be included in the kits given out during planned outreach activities over the next two years.



Example of material included in the "Sentinel" toolkit

1.4. COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Communication with Members

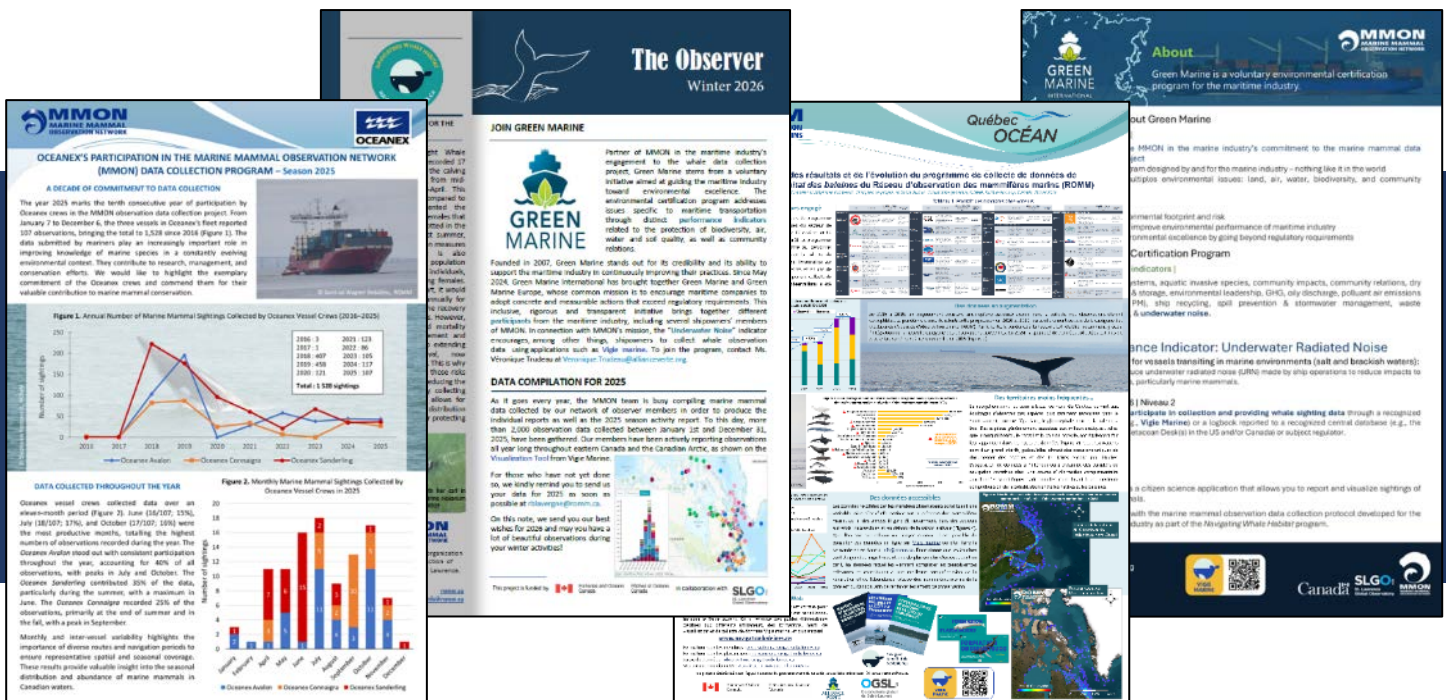
The program's observer members, especially ship operators and organizers of marine observation activities, remained highly active in 2025. Personalized data collection reports sent to each organization at the end of the year highlighted their respective contributions, summarized observations, and described the evolution of their involvement while encouraging the teams to continue gathering data on marine mammals.

MMON maintained regular contact with its members through the newsletter *L'Observateur* (published four times in 2025–2026), which presents data collection results, member contributions, and updates to the Navigating Whale Habitat program. Direct exchanges and tailored follow-ups were also conducted to answer questions related to the use of the *Vigie Marine* app and to support training needs,

particularly with regard to the transition from paper-based to digital data collection.

Furthermore, MMON and its partners continued to distribute educational materials at various events. In February 2026, MMON participated in the Québec-Océan Annual Scientific Meeting and the St. Lawrence Dialogue Forum, fostering exchanges with members of the maritime industry, providers of marine observation activities and a number of program partners, including Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Green Marine.

Lastly, in partnership with Green Marine, MMON produced a summary document to promote the use of *Vigie Marine* within the environmental certification program, particularly with regard to the underwater noise indicator. Stewardship materials, including *A Fisher's Guide to Whales on the East Coast of Canada*, also continued to be distributed at training sessions for fishery observers from Biorex and Javitech.



Communication with the General Public

In 2025, MMON continued and strengthened the deployment of the Sentinels of the St. Lawrence project in an effort to step up efforts to educate the general public on the presence of marine mammals at risk in the St. Lawrence and promote the tools of the Navigating Whale Habitat program. Efforts were focused on organizing and manning a dozen or so information booths at maritime and community events across a vast territory covering the Bas-Saint-Laurent, Gaspésie and Côte-Nord regions. In parallel, 13 interpretive and citizen science activities were conducted aboard ferries in the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf. Several joint initiatives—including a shared booth with Parks Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada in Rivière-du-Loup as well as a joint river crossing during the Trois-Pistoles Maritime Festival—were flagged as particularly successful experiences to be repeated in the future.

All in all, 2025 activities reached approximately 2,700 individuals, including boaters, ferry

passengers, tourists, local citizens and school groups. These events provided an opportunity to present marine mammal conservation challenges, reiterate best practices for navigating their habitat, and promote citizen participation in data collection through the *Vigie Marine* app. To support these awareness-raising efforts, substantial volumes of promotional and educational material were distributed, which is testimony to the scale of the public communications efforts in 2025.

Sentinels of the St. Lawrence activities also enjoyed favourable media coverage, notably through a press release in July 2025 announcing the deployment of information kiosks and ferry activities, as well as a press review highlighting the coverage of MMON's initiatives in regional and provincial media. Each of these events was also posted on [MMON's Facebook page](#) and its partners' pages. Lastly, a January 2026 meeting of the Sentinels advisory committee provided an opportunity to review the 2025 season with partners, discuss the impact of the project and identify areas for improvement and development in the coming years.



1.5. OUTLOOK FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN 2026-2027

MMON received confirmation that financial assistance would be provided under Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) for Aquatic Species at Risk for the 2025-2026 to 2027-2028 fiscal years. This funding will help ensure continuity in the training and recruiting of observer members, maintain and develop the web platform, and consolidate the development of the citizen science component of the program, particularly through the Sentinels of the St. Lawrence project, which aims to increase citizen participation in documenting marine mammal sightings using *Vigie Marine*.

The main activities planned for 2026-2027 are as follows:

- Ongoing communication activities to raise awareness of the Navigating Whale Habitat platform and the Vigie Marine application among various users of the St. Lawrence.
- MMON's participation as an exhibitor at Green Marine's Greentech 2026 conference (June 2026) in a bid to strengthen ties with the maritime industry and promote the use of *Vigie Marine* in the context of environmental certification.
- Year 2 deployment of Sentinels of the St. Lawrence, including citizen science outreach and awareness activities on ferries and at maritime and community events across several regions of eastern Quebec.
- New promotional tools, including a map of shore-based observation sites, are being distributed to the public to encourage low-impact whale watching from land.
- Citizen data collection from shore is being enhanced, notably in more remote areas, through improved visibility of vantage points and increased support for participants.
- Ongoing recruitment efforts for new observer members in key sectors of the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf, including the Côte-Nord region (Haute Côte-Nord and Basse-Côte-Nord).
- Increased use of MMON's data in research and conservation initiatives, including the nomination of the Banc-des-Américains Marine Protected Area to the Blue Park program, COSEWIC's updated blue whale report, and a Canadian Wildlife Federation research project on the risks of collisions between ships and marine mammals.
- Continued distribution of stewardship tools developed for the maritime, tourism, and fisheries sectors to support the adoption of best practices.



Observation from a shore-based observation site © M. Spehner, MMON

PART 2 • RECAP OF DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN 2025

2.1. CONTINUOUS EFFORTS TO SUPPORT MEMBERS AND RETROSPECTIVE OF PAST RESULTS

In 2025, MMON maintained a high level of support for its observer members to boost their participation in the Navigating Whale Habitat program and to promote the adoption of data collection tools, particularly in the context of the redesign of *Vigie Marine*. Efforts were focused on technical support, ongoing training, and personalized feedback—key elements for ensuring the quality of collected data and maintaining members' long-term commitments.

Support for observer members from the maritime industry and providers of marine observation activities continued throughout the year through direct communication, individualized follow-ups, and targeted interventions in response to specific needs. Several organizations requested ad hoc support for training or clarifications vis-à-vis *Vigie Marine*, notably how to enter offshore observations and adapting the tool to their operational realities. These exchanges helped identify key adjustments to prioritize while strengthening the shared understanding of data collection protocols.

The annual distribution of data collection reports tailored to each observer member remained a central element of the program's feedback strategy. In 2025, 22 of the 34 member organizations submitted observation data, which is a reflection of the diverse operational realities of the different member categories. Furthermore, 23 individual reports were

produced and sent to participating organizations (two reports were produced for the STQ: one for Matane and one for L'Isle-aux-Coudres). Highly valued by members, these reports highlight their respective contributions, summarize their observations, and situate their data collection efforts within a broader program overview. This custom feedback is an important lever for maintaining team motivation and supporting continued data collection despite representing a significant workload for MMON's team given the size and growth of the network.



2.2. A FEW HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE 2025-2026 ACTIVITY SEASON

The third phase of development of the *Navigating Whale Habitat* program, which ran from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2025, notably aimed to consolidate the involvement of organizers of marine observation activities. The agreements signed during this period ensured continuity in this member category's active participation despite a few organizational adjustments, including the loss of Excursions de la Providence following the latter's dissolution, which was offset by the integration of Provancher Société. Agreements signed with Griffon Aventure and Excursions de l'Île Grande Basque came into effect in 2025, marking a transition to a new phase of network development.

In 2025, the program network continued to grow and now comprises 34 members with signed collaboration agreements. These include 15 members from the maritime industry, 15 organizers of marine observation activities and 4 institutions and conservation parks. The year was also marked by the renewal of three existing agreements and the addition of two new observer members: Croisières Julien-Cloutier and the Rivière-du-Loup-

Saint-Siméon ferry, which bolstered the program's territorial coverage in the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf.

At the same time, MMON continued its efforts to encourage members from the maritime industry to get involved. Discussions initiated with Green Marine continued to promote the integration of the *Vigie Marine* application within the environmental certification program, notably with regard to data collection criteria. This collaborative work helps consolidate the program's long-term presence within the maritime sector while optimizing the participation of ship operators in applied science.

Lastly, MMON and its partners continued their efforts to support citizen participation in the program. Although citizen observations showed a slight downturn in 2025, the data they collected remains particularly relevant, especially outside the summer months. The consolidation of the member network, more robust support services, and ongoing tool development (including *Vigie Marine*) provide a solid foundation for ensuring program sustainability and growth in the years to come.



A humpback whale a whale-watching Zodiac © S. Giroux, MMON



2.3. OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING COMPANIES

	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR VESSEL OPERATOR MEMBERS				
Algoma Central Corporation		Algoma Central Corporation is a Canadian global marine transportation company that owns and operates dry and liquid bulk carriers, serving markets domestically and internationally.	14 participating vessels since 2018, including 3 ships collecting data in 2025.	St. Lawrence Seaway, US east coast, Canadian and US west coasts
Atlantic Towing		Atlantic Towing specialize in various maritime services such as offshore towing, ice management, offshore installation resupply, oil-spill response and personnel transfer.	One participating vessel in 2024 (<i>Paul A. Sacuta</i>).	Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, British Columbia et Trinidad and Tobago
Baffinland		Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation is a Canadian mining company that produces high-grade direct shipping ore on Baffin Island (Nunavut) and subcontracts vessel owners/operators for transport.	22 participating vessels since 2020, including 9 active ships in 2025.	Eastern Arctic
Compagnie de navigation des Basques		CNB is a private company that operates the ferry between Trois-Pistoles and Les Escoumins.	1 participating ferry (<i>Héritage 1</i>) since 2017.	St. Lawrence Estuary
Corporation des pilotes du Bas-Saint-Laurent		The Corporation des pilotes du Bas-Saint-Laurent safely escorts ships on the St. Lawrence between Les Escoumins and Québec City, as well as on the Saguenay River.	MMON member since 2025.	St. Lawrence Estuary and Saguenay Fjord
CTMA		CTMA provides passenger and freight transportation between the Magdalen Islands and the mainland.	No data collection since 2023.	Gulf of St. Lawrence



	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR VESSEL OPERATOR MEMBERS				
Fednav		Fednav specializes in the transport of dry bulk, industrial minerals and other general cargo on a fleet of owned and chartered vessels.	3 participating vessels since 2018, including 2 active ships in 2025 (<i>Arvik I</i> & <i>Umiak I</i>).	Canadian Arctic, Great Lakes, and St. Lawrence Seaway.
Groupe CSL		CSL manages the world's largest fleet of self-unloading vessels and owns and operates a highly diversified fleet of bulk carriers and offshore transhippers.	4 participating vessels since 2015, including 1 active ship in 2025 (<i>Ferbec</i>).	St. Lawrence Seaway
Groupe Desgagnés		Desgagnés is a Quebec group operating over 20 vessels (liquid and dry bulk, and general cargo) including one passenger-cargo ship.	Over twenty participating vessels since 2015, including 19 active ships in 2025.	St. Lawrence Seaway, Maritime Provinces, Canadian Arctic and international.
Marine Atlantic		Marine Atlantic operates a ferry service between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador	5 participating vessels since 2019, including 3 active ships in 2025 (<i>Leif Ericson</i> , <i>Ala'suinu</i> & <i>Highlanders</i>).	Gulf of St. Lawrence between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador.
NEAS		NEAS mission is to deliver reliable marine resupply, as well as container, packaging and project planning services for destinations such as the remote Eastern and Western Arctic.	8 participating vessels between 2020 & 2024, and 2 active ships in 2025 (<i>Mitik</i> & <i>Qamutik</i>).	Eastern and Western Arctic
Oceanex		Oceanex Inc. provides intermodal transportation services to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.	3 participating vessels since 2018 (<i>Sanderling</i> , <i>Connaigra</i> & <i>Avalon</i>).	Gulf of St. Lawrence
Reformar		Reformar supports researchers and science organizations into the realization of marine science and technology projects by providing access to scientific instruments and equipment.	One participating vessel since 2023 (<i>Coriolis II</i>)	Estuary & Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Canadian Arctic

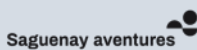


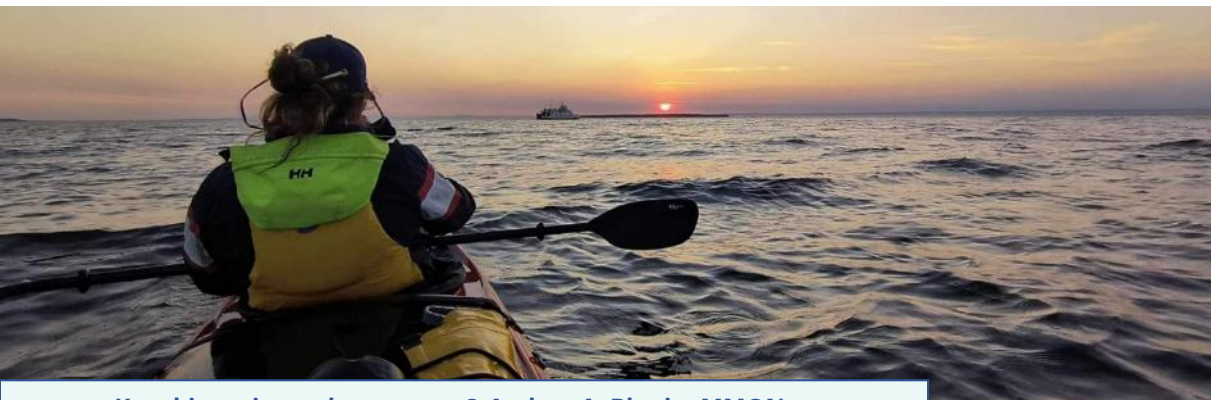
	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR VESSEL OPERATOR MEMBERS				
Société des traversiers du Québec		The STQ is a Crown corporation and an important maritime carrier that offers ferry services in Quebec. It oversees a network of 13 ferry crossings throughout the St. Lawrence.	2 vessels for the Matane and L'Isle-aux-Coudres crossings and 2 ferry terminals (Godbout and Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive).	Estuary & Gulf of St. Lawrence
Traverse RDL – Saint-Siméon		Private ferry operator providing maritime services between Rivière-du-Loup & Saint-Siméon in the St. Lawrence estuary.	1 vessel (<i>NM Trans-Saint-Laurent</i>), member since 2025.	St. Lawrence Estuary between Rivière-du-Loup and Saint-Siméon.
OUR PROVIDERS OF MARINE OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES				
Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators		The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators is a membership organization representing Arctic expedition cruise operators and industry stakeholders.	Member since 2023, 1 active cruise operator in 2025 (<i>HX Expeditions</i>) with 1 vessel (<i>MS Roald Amundsen</i>)	Arctic Region and Northwestern passage
Cap Aventure		Departing from Gaspé Quay, Cap Aventure offers a range of sea excursions, including trips by Zodiac, kayak or stand-up paddleboard.	1 zodiac (<i>Cap Aventure 2</i>)	Bay of Gaspé and Gulf of St. Lawrence
Croisières AML		Croisières AML offers various types of cruises out of nearly a dozen ports along the St. Lawrence River and Estuary, including whale-watching trips in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park.	Member since 2025.	St. Lawrence Estuary (Marine Park)
Croisières Baie de Gaspé		Croisières Baie de Gaspé offers whale-watching excursions departing from the Grande-Grave wharf in Forillon National Park.	2 operating vessels (<i>Narval III</i> and <i>Rocher le Vieux</i>), member since 2025	Bay of Gaspé and Gulf of St. Lawrence



	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR PROVIDERS OF MARINE OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES				
Croisières Escoumins		Croisières Escoumins offers whale-watching trips in the north shore sector of the St. Lawrence Estuary and in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park.	4 Zodiacs operating in 2024.	St. Lawrence Estuary and Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park.
Croisières Essipit		Croisières Essipit offers Zodiac-based whale-watching trips in the north shore sector of the St. Lawrence Estuary and in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park.	5 Zodiacs operating in 2025.	St. Lawrence Estuary and Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park.
Croisière Forillon		Offered by Auberge Griffon Aventure, Croisière Forillon allows you to discover the coast of Forillon National Park (including Cap Bon-Ami and Baie Verte) while observing seals and seabirds.	1 vessel (<i>Mathilde</i>); member since 2024.	Gulf of St. Lawrence (coast of Forillon National Park)
Croisières Julien Cloutier		Croisières Julien Cloutier offers discovery cruises in the Percé and Bonaventure Island region, including whale-watching excursions.	4 vessels and 1 Zodiac; member since 2025.	Gulf of St. Lawrence, Percé, Bonaventure Island, Gaspé Bay.
Croisières Sept-Îles		Croisières Sept-Îles offers a variety of boat trips in the Bay of Sept-Îles, including wildlife viewing, exploration of La Grande Basque Island, offshore fishing trips and private custom cruises.	Member since 2025.	Bay of Sept-Îles
ÉcoMaris		ÉcoMaris is a non-profit organization that offers educational programs and discovery stays on the St. Lawrence aboard a training sailboat.	1 sailboat (<i>Ecomaris</i>) participating since 2016.	Estuary & Gulf of St. Lawrence



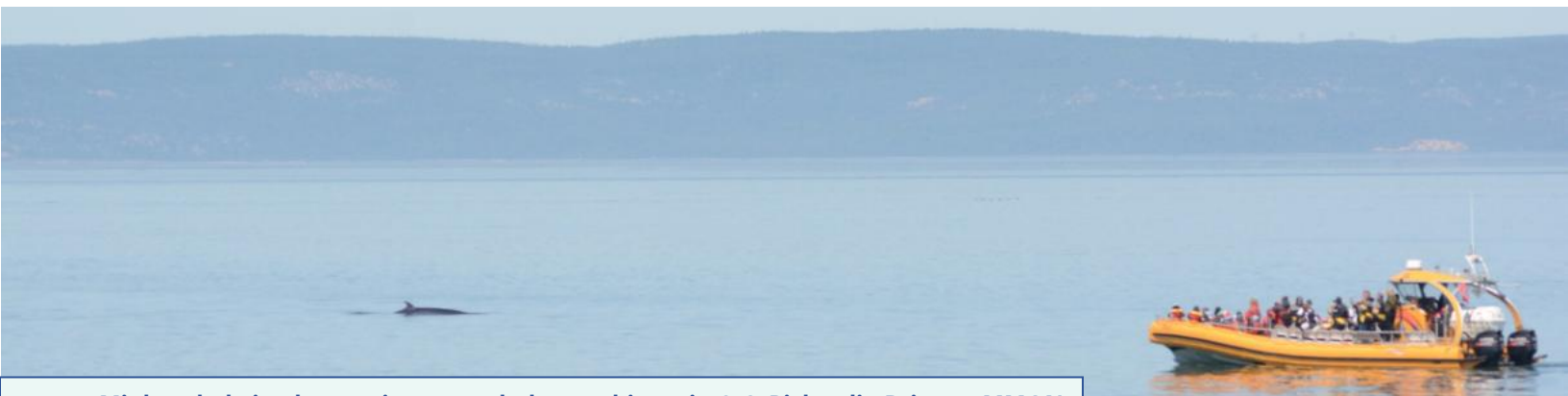
	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR PROVIDERS OF MARINE OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES				
Excursion GWD	GWD Services maritimes	Offers maritime services of all kinds: tourist excursions, transport and industrial.	Member since 2025.	Bay of Sept-Îles
Saguenay aventures		Saguenay Aventures offers whale-watching cruises and sea kayaking trips on the Saguenay Fjord.	Member since 2022.	Saguenay Fjord
Société d'écologie des battures du Kamouraska		SEBKA offers sea kayaking trips in the Kamouraska Islands archipelago	Sea kayaker, a member since MMON was founded.	St. Lawrence Estuary
Société Provancher	 Société Provancher	Société Provancher is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to contribute to nature conservation. Among other things, the Society offers excursions and guided tours of the Île-aux-Basques Natural and Historical Park, in the Trois-Pistoles area.	1 passenger vessel (<i>Léon-Provancher</i>), member since 2025.	St. Lawrence Estuary
Tourisme Sept-Îles	TOURISME SEPT-ÎLES	Tourisme Sept-Îles is a non-profit organization that organizes, structures, and develops the tourism industry in Sept-Îles in partnership with local stakeholders. It offers excursions around La Grande Basque Island.	Member since 2024.	Bay of Sept-Îles



Kayaking trip on the estuary © Audrey A. Blouin, MMON



	LOGO	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING VESSELS IN 2025	REGION COVERED
OUR MEMBERS FROM CONSERVATION PARKS AND INSTITUTIONS				
Cégep de La Pocatière		The program of Bioécologie organises a number of sea kayaking trips to train students in recording marine mammal sightings in the Kamouraska Islands archipelago, in collaboration with SEBKA.	Sea kayaker, active member since 2016.	St. Lawrence Estuary
Parc national du Bic		Since 1998, Bic National Park (Sépaq) has been working with MMON on harbour seal monitoring. Park rangers collect observation data from onshore sites in the presence of visitors for interpretive purposes.	No vessels. Shore-based data collection.	St. Lawrence Estuary and Bas-Saint-Laurent region
Parcs Canada		Parks Canada is the co-manager of the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park, which operates a number of land-based marine mammal viewing sites.	Active member since 2022; using Parks Canada boats and collecting from the shore.	Saguenay – St. Lawrence Marine Park
NEMO-ISMER		NEMO) is the student association for the oceanography programme at the Institute of Marine Sciences, University of Quebec at Rimouski. Students can collect data whilst taking part in oceanographic missions aboard research vessels.	Member since 2024.	Estuary & Gulf of St. Lawrence



Minke whale in observation on a whale-watching trip © C. Pichardie-Brisson, MMON

PART 3 • RESULTS OF DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM IN 2025

The efforts made by observers to report their sightings have concrete and measurable benefits. In 2025, the Navigating Whale Habitat program continued to rely on an active and diverse network of members whose opportunistic observations are an increasingly recognized source of information within the scientific and conservation communities. The volume, extensive spatial coverage, and year-round distribution of collected data provide significant added value for documenting the frequency, distribution, and relative abundance of various whale and seal species in the St. Lawrence River and the waters of Canada's East Coast while complementing data gathered in the context of targeted research programs.

In this regard, already in 2024, a [Science Advisory Report](#) published by Fisheries and Oceans Canada referenced the opportunistic data of MMON's observer member network as part of the recovery potential assessment for the St. Lawrence Estuary beluga.

The year 2025 further reinforced this recognition by once again underscoring the relevance and potential applications of the program's data. Over the past year, MMON data were requested by a number of research and conservation organizations, demonstrating the practical utility of a regionally structured opportunistic observation model. These requests were related to the nomination of the Banc-des-Américains Marine Protected Area to the Blue Park program, COSEWIC's updated blue whale report, and a Canadian Wildlife Federation research project on the risks of collisions between ships and several large cetacean species. While these projects are still ongoing and results have yet to be published, they demonstrate the scientific and applied value of member-documented observations. We are grateful for your excellent contribution!



St. Lawrence Beluga © Fanny Gandolphe, MMON

3.1. WHALE DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS IN THE ST. LAWRENCE IN 2025

The 2025 whale-watching season saw a continuation of the trends observed in recent years, with the diversity of species in the St. Lawrence remaining high but the number of reported sightings showing a slight decline. Once again, observers reported the presence of several species of rorquals, including fin, humpback and minke whales, as well as various species of smaller cetaceans and seals. Often mentioned by observers was the diversity of species observed in the St. Lawrence Estuary, a situation that was confirmed by MMON's biologists in their respective study sectors.

On the other hand, some sectors showed more variable patterns in 2025. In the Gaspé Peninsula, where certain large cetaceans (notably the humpback whale) are usually well represented, sightings were less frequent than in some previous years. Conversely, the St. Lawrence Estuary remains a key area for data collection due to both the diversity of species observed there and the possibility of documenting presences over longer periods, including the off-season.

Overall, the total number of data points collected in 2025 decreased, as did the number of companies that submitted observations. This trend is part of a broader pattern observed in the waters of eastern Canada, where the presence of

certain marine mammal species appears to be more variable depending on the sector and annual conditions. Environmental conditions, the operational realities of members, and potential shifts in the spatial distribution of species can influence the ability to detect and report sightings.

Despite this context, the data collected in 2025 are still highly valuable, especially in light of their extensive spatial coverage and year-round distribution. The combined contributions of observer members and citizens help document the presence of marine mammals in strategic areas such as the St. Lawrence Estuary and the Gaspé Peninsula, while also providing valuable information for periods and areas that are less well covered by targeted research programs. The following sections present a detailed overview of the 2025 data collection results broken down by member category and activity sector of the Navigating Whale Habitat program.



Observer member on the Matane-Godbout – Baie-Comeau crossing © Sonia Giroux, MMON

3.2. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS REPORTED BY SHIP OPERATORS IN 2025

Fewer Data After a Decade of Collection

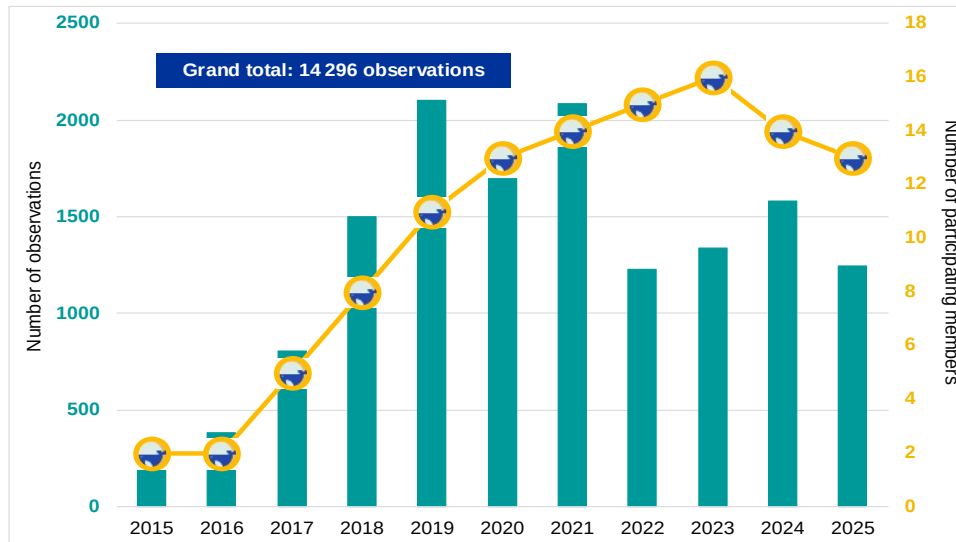


Figure 1. Evolution of observation data logged and number of participating ship operators and ferry terminals, 2015-2025

The Navigating Whale Habitat program's data collection project for observer members celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025. Figure 1 shows the evolution of the number of data points collected and the number of participants in the ship operator and ferry terminal category since the program was first launched in 2015. In 2025, 13 active members in this category submitted a total of 1,246 observations, bringing the cumulative total to 14,296 data points over 10 years. Despite a dip in observations submitted by participants in 2025, the volume remains comparable to that of the previous four (post-pandemic) years. Among other things, this decrease might be explained by the operational realities of the members (e.g. shortened season, vessel repairs), the influence of weather conditions, and potentially fewer marine mammal sightings on the routes covered. These factors may have partially affected members' abilities to detect marine species in recent years.

Nevertheless, a number of members have consistently contributed to data collection since the project's inception in 2015 or have accumulated many years of participation since

they first joined the program. The longest-standing participants are Canada Steamship Lines and Groupe Desgagnés (2015 -), the Matane-Baie-Comeau-Godbout ferry and Godbout ferry terminal as well as the Compagnie de navigation des Basques (2017 -), Algoma, Fednav and Oceanex (2018 -). Other members, such as Baffinland, Marine Atlantic, and NEAS, also stand out for their consistent participation of more than five years.

Figure 2 shows the members who participated in 2025 and the number of observations documented by each member. Groupe Desgagnés contributed a full 60.0% of the data received in 2025. The Matane-Baie-Comeau-Godbout ferry, Oceanex, and Fednav each contributed between 5.0% and 10.0% of the data set, while the other nine companies accounted for a combined 5.0% of all observations.

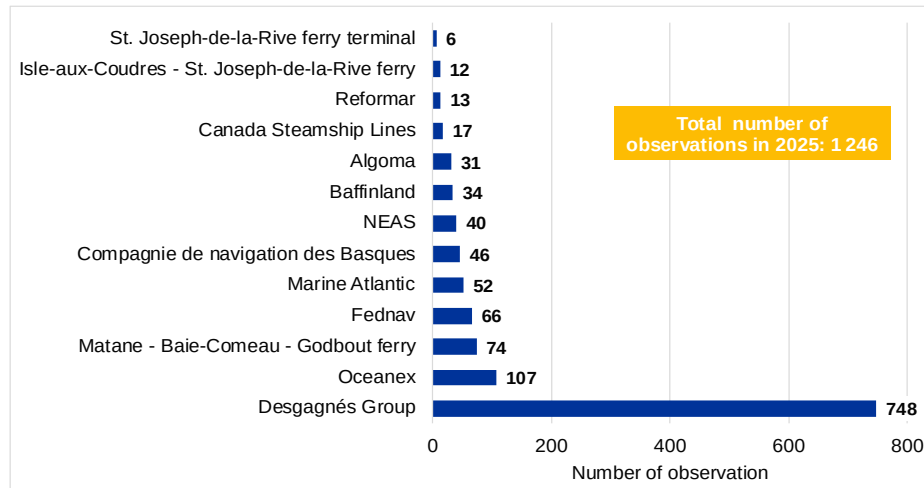


Figure 2. Number of observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025

As in previous years, data collection by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025 covered all 12 months of the year (Figure 3). However, nearly 90.0% of all observations (1,119 of 1,246) were recorded between May and October, a period corresponding to the absence of ice cover, which favours both the presence of marine mammals in the productive waters of the St. Lawrence and the Arctic,¹ and the activity of participating companies offering seasonal transport. The bulk of the data collection—just over 70.0% of observations (between 145 and 263 records per month)—took place in the summer (June to September). Conversely, from January to April and from November to December, sightings were less frequent but were proportionally greater in 2025 than in previous years. Winter data are particularly valuable given that the presence of marine mammals is less frequent and remains poorly documented, and members of the maritime industry are among the few players in a position to document this presence.

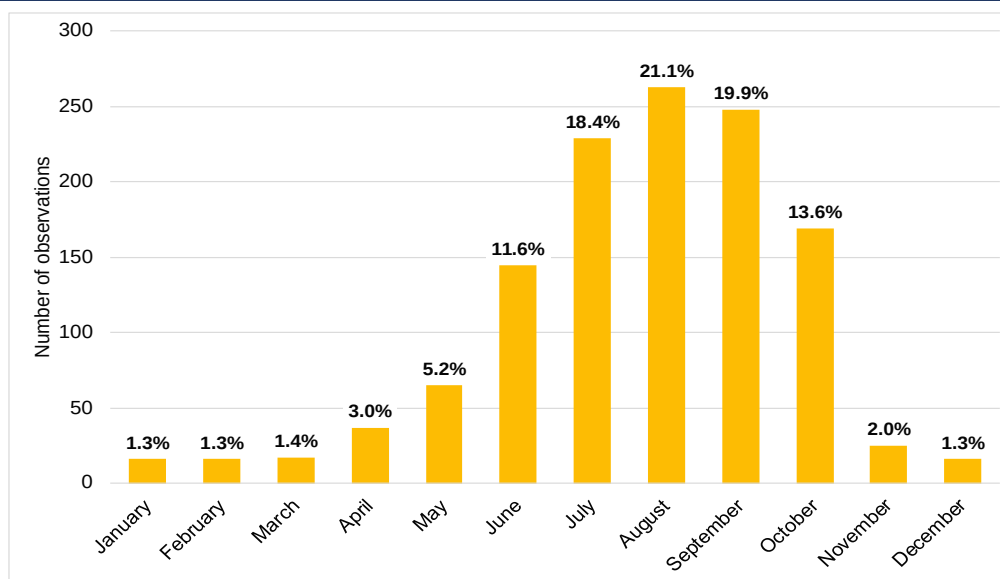
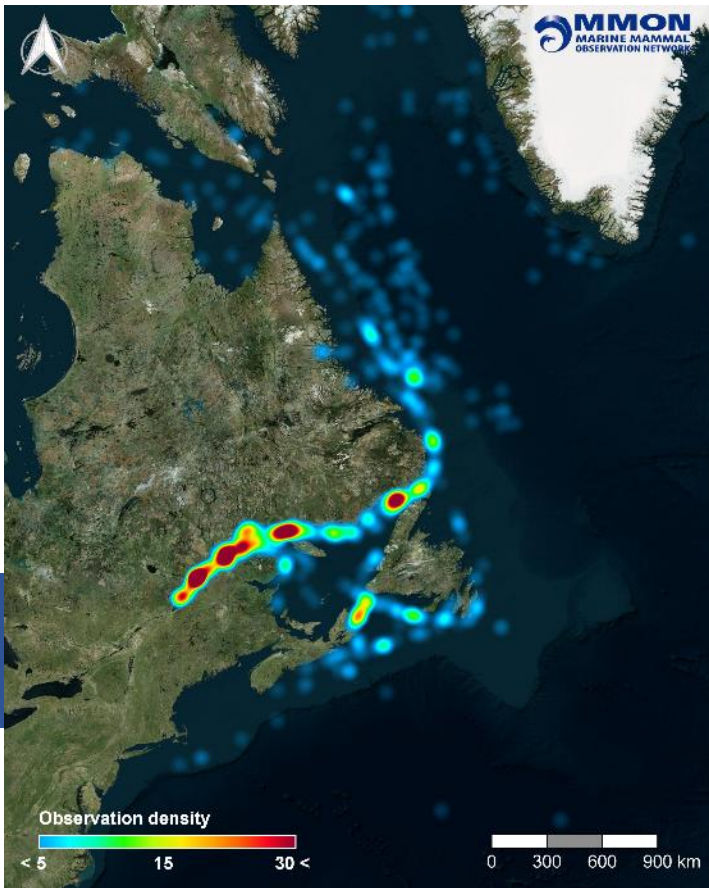


Figure 3. Monthly breakdown (numbers and percentages) of observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025

¹ Halliday, W., S. McBeth, V. Vergara, S. Ferguson, L. Loseto, M. Marcoux, K. Westdal, A. Niemi, L. Harwood, M. Gold, D. Koonoo, N. Qillaq and J. Lennie (2022). Marine mammals in a changing Arctic Ocean. Polar Knowledge: Aqhalat Report, Volume 4, *Polar Knowledge Canada*, pp. 58–83. DOI : 10.35298/pkc.2021.03.fra



Vast Coverage Area

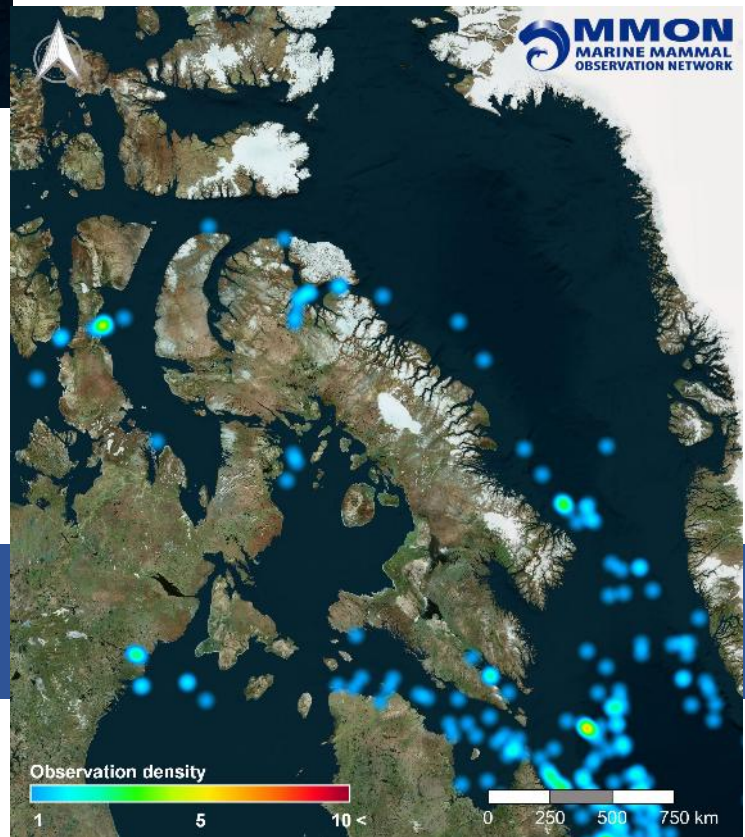


Map 1. Density of observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025 - Canadian East Coast



© M. Ouellet,
MMON

Map 2. Density of observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025 - Northern Quebec and Arctic



Data were collected by participating ship operators and ferry terminals from the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf, including the Atlantic Ocean off the eastern coasts of Canada and the US (Map 1), and as far north as the Arctic and northern Quebec (Map 2).

- The highest density of observations is located in Map 1, namely in the St. Lawrence Estuary (285 data points) and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (503 data points). Indeed, these "hotspots" correspond to corridors regularly used by vessels operated by NWH members, as well as near the coasts, especially where ferries (190 data points) operate. Hotspots are also found in narrower sectors such as the Jacques Cartier Strait (94 observations), Cabot Strait (51 observations), and the Strait of Belle Isle (33 observations). Observations are also numerous (209 records) in the Labrador Sea between the Canadian and Greenlandic coasts, with a few hotspots even present. Lastly, 130 observations were recorded across the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, the two most distant from shore being approximately 1,000 km off the coast of Newfoundland.
- In the greater Arctic region (Map 2), observations are particularly numerous at lower latitudes such as in the Davis Strait (63 records), as well as in Hudson Strait (19 records), Ungava Bay (7 records), and Hudson Bay (9 records). The other few observations located even farther north are in the bays and straits surrounding Bylot Island (9 records), in Lancaster Sound (1 record), in the Gulf of Boothia and Prince Regent Inlet (9 records), Foxe Basin (3 records), and, lastly, in Franklin Strait and Larsen Sound (3 records).



Minke whale and merchant vessel in the St. Lawrence Estuary
© C. Dupasquier, MMON

Importance of Data on Whales and Other Marine Species

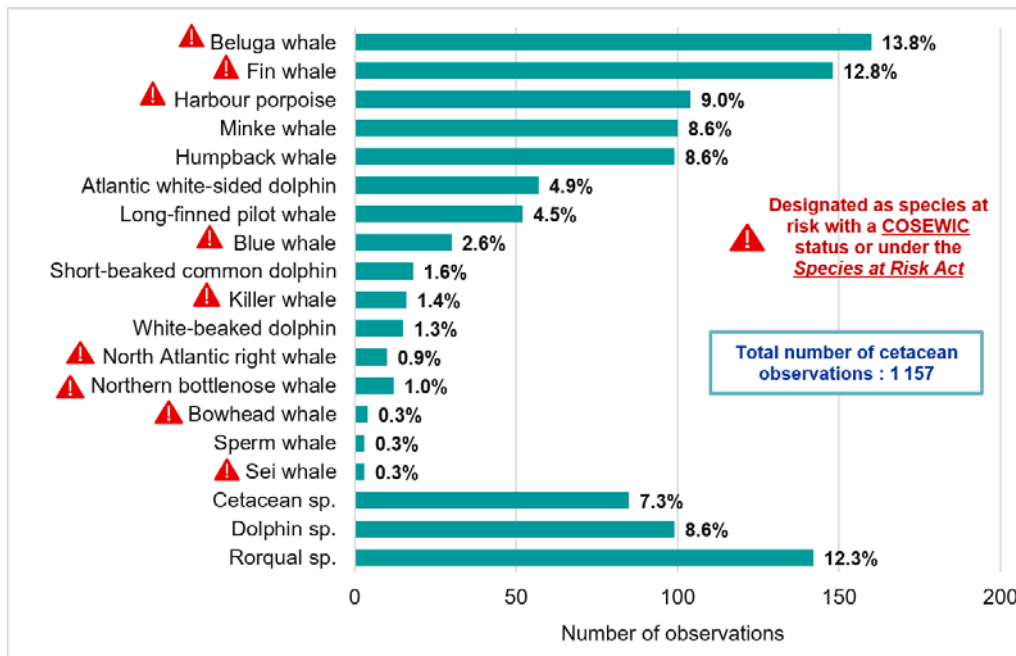


Figure 4. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of cetacean observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025

In 2025, cetacean sightings logged by observers in the ship operator and ferry terminal category formed an impressive set of 1,157 data points (Figure 4). Of these, 16 species were definitively identified, while sightings where the species could not be conclusively identified (or presented a degree of uncertainty) were grouped under three more generic taxa: cetacean sp., dolphin sp., and rorqual sp. Beluga and fin whales, observed 160 and 148 times, respectively, were the most numerous species and together accounted for 26.6% of the total sightings. A further 26.2% of observations corresponded to harbour porpoises (104 sightings), minke whales (100 sightings), and humpback whales (99 sightings). Three dolphin species were also recorded, representing a total of 7.8% of observed species. More precisely, the Atlantic white-sided dolphin was observed 57 times, the short-beaked common dolphin 18 times, and the white-beaked dolphin 15 times. Additionally, nine endangered species accounted for 487 records (42.1%), including the blue whale (30 observations) and the North Atlantic right whale (10 observations). Lastly, the three general taxa associated with unconfirmed identification totalled 326 records, or 28.2% of the total data set. This information is essential and notably helps document the geographic distribution of cetaceans.



Fin whale © S. Payant-Lévesque, MMON

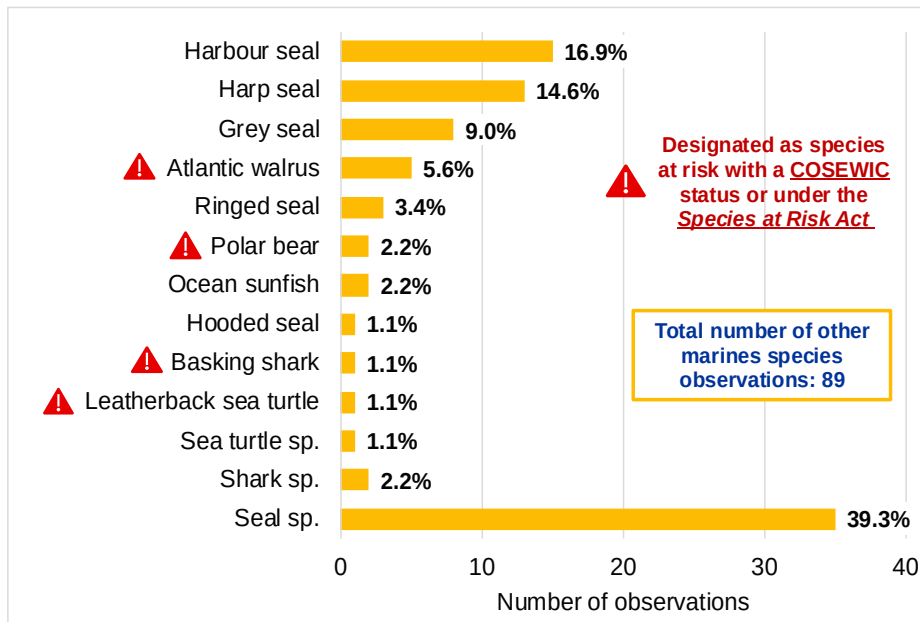


Figure 5. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of non-cetacean observations reported by ship operators and ferry terminals in 2025

In addition to cetaceans, data collected in 2025 by ship operators and ferry terminals also include reports of seals and other marine caniforms, fish, and turtles. Together, these species account for 89 records (Figure 5). Five species of seal were recorded for a total of 40 records (44.9%), primarily harbour seals (15) and harp seals (13). Other marine caniforms such as the Atlantic walrus (5) and polar bear (2) were recorded a few times, as were several other marine species, namely ocean sunfish (2), basking shark (1), and leatherback turtle (1). Lastly, records for which the species could not be identified were grouped under three more generic taxa (seal sp., shark sp., and turtle sp.), which together account for 42.7% of this subset.



Harbour seals © J. Linossier, MMON

3.3. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS REPORTED BY ORGANIZERS OF MARINE OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES AND INSTITUTIONS IN 2025

A Dynamic and Meaningful Involvement in the Program

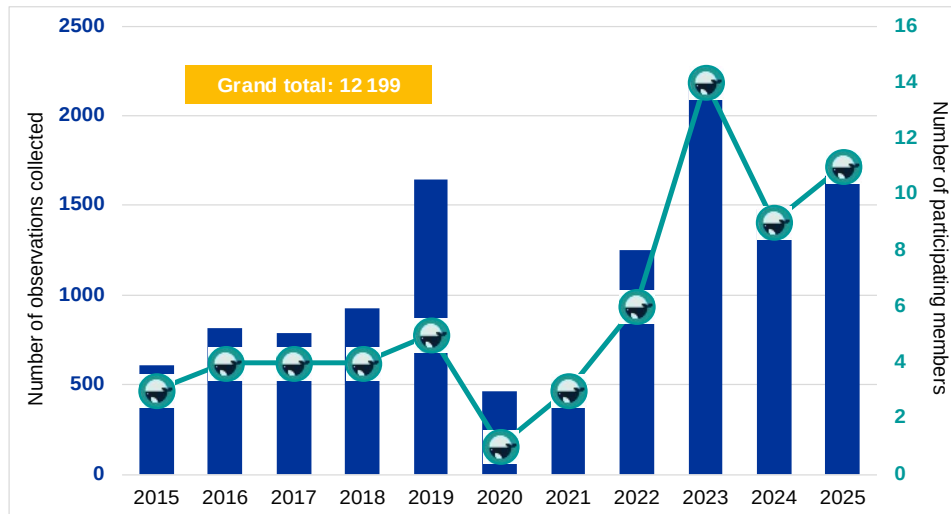


Figure 6. Evolution of collected observations and number of participating organizers of marine observation activities and institutions, 2015-2025

The other category of observer members of the Navigating Whale Habitat program includes whale-watching companies as well as institutions and conservation parks. Data from Bic National Park are not included in this report, though they are used by park managers to monitor harbour seals that frequent haul-out sites. Figure 6 illustrates how their participation has evolved since 2015, both in terms of the number of members and the volume of data submitted. After a dip due to the pandemic (2020-2021), participation rebounded in 2022 thanks to recruitment efforts and increased again in 2023. After a slight decline in 2024, 2025 stands out with an increase of 187 data points for a total of 1,666 observations. This is the second most productive year after 2023 (2,167). Since 2015, this category has accumulated 12,199 data points.

Some members in this category have been involved in the data collection program for several years, making a significant contribution to the database's development. The longest-standing partners are Croisières Baie de Gaspé,

Cégep de La Pocatière, and Société d'écologie de la Batture du Kamouraska (since 2015), followed by ÉcoMaris (since 2016) and Croisières Escoumins (since 2017). A new surge of participation also began in 2022, with Cap Aventure, Parks Canada, and Saguenay Aventure undertaking a dedicated data collection effort that continues to this day.

Figure 7 below shows the number of observations collected in 2025 by each member that contributed data. Among members offering guided marine mammal-watching activities, Croisières Essipit (32.7%) and Cap Aventure (31.7%) alone account for nearly two-thirds of collected data, while Croisières Baie de Gaspé contributes a further 16.0%. HX Expeditions (formerly known as Hurtigruten), the only AECO member to have collected data in the Arctic this year, accounts for 5.2%. Each of the other partners accounts for less than 5.0% of the annual data collection.

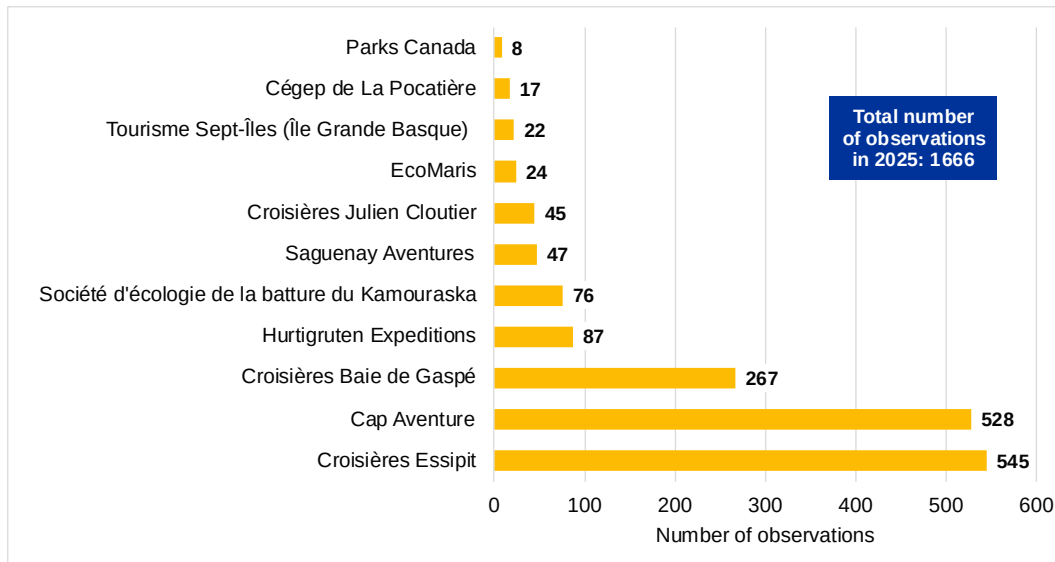


Figure 7. Number of observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities or institutions in 2025

As can be seen in Figure 8 below, the data collection period for whale-watching companies and other institutional members reflects a strong seasonality that is closely linked to the presence of marine mammals and navigability. The majority of the data (96.4%) was recorded between June and September. The other months show smaller data sets due to a reduced number of outings (low tourist season) and weather conditions that are often less favourable for detection. This decrease is also attributable to the local decline in marine mammal populations associated with seasonal migrations.

Relevant Data on Marine Mammal Distribution Patterns

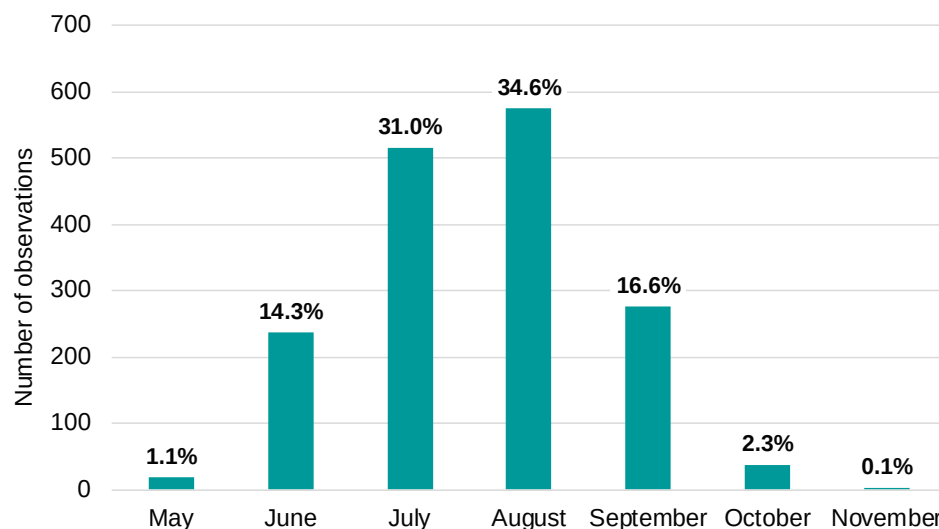


Figure 8. Monthly breakdown (numbers and percentages) of marine mammal observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions in 2025

A substantial collection of 1,474 cetacean sightings was recorded by providers of marine observation activities (whale-watching companies) and institutions in 2025 (Figure 9). This collection comprises nine identified species, six of which are at risk, and two groups of generic taxa for sightings of species that could not be conclusively identified. Humpback whales dominated the rankings, accounting for more than one-third (36.4%) of all sightings (537). Fin whales (274) and minke whales (272) sightings represent a further one-third of the year's observations, totalling 37.1% of the data in this category. Other large whales such as blue whales (95) and bowhead whales (22) were sighted less frequently and accounted for 7.9% of all sightings. All large cetaceans combined make up 81.4% of recorded sightings. The impressive size of these individuals, their localized rarity, and the spectacular behaviour of some of these species are what makes them so prized by whale-watching companies.² Smaller cetaceans such as harbour porpoises (132), beluga (119), Atlantic white-sided dolphin (17), and narwhal (1), represent nearly one-fifth (18.2%) of the data set. Lastly, five unidentified sightings of dolphins and rorquals were submitted.

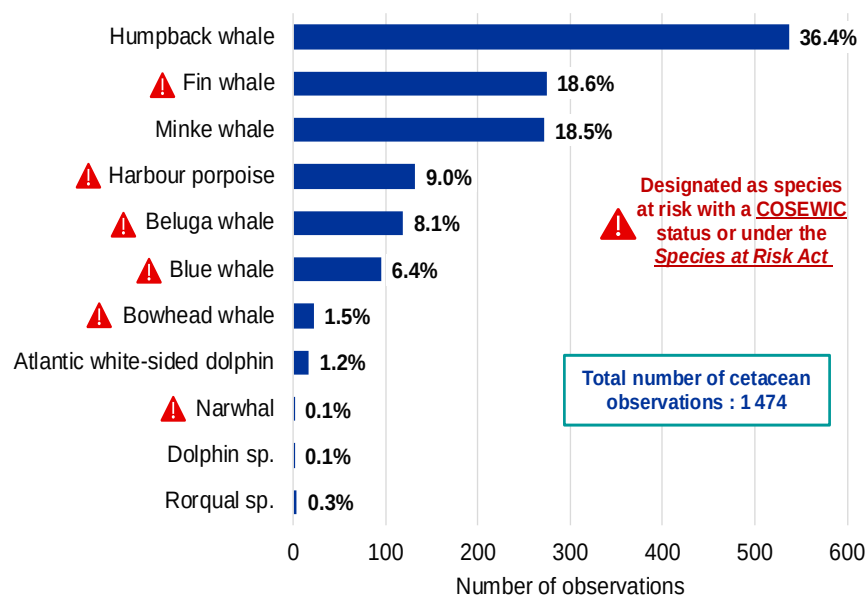


Figure 9. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of cetacean observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions in 2025



Fin whale © C. Dupasquier, MMON

² Martins, C.C., S. Turgeon, R. Michaud and N. Ménard (2018). Suivi des espèces ciblées par les activités d'observation en mer dans le parc marin du Saguenay–Saint-Laurent de 1994 à 2017. *Le Naturaliste canadien*, 142(2), 65-79.

Figure 10 shows other marine species (e.g. seals and fish) that were observed by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions. A total of 192 observations of these species were reported during the 2025 season. These data are dominated by pinnipeds (79.7%), the three main species being harbour seals (61), grey seals (48), and ringed seals (34).

Other species were documented more sporadically depending on the region. In the Arctic, the operator HX Expeditions recorded several polar bears (5) and Atlantic walruses (2). In the Gaspé Peninsula, excursions produced fish sightings such as basking sharks (8), bluefin tuna (3), and ocean sunfish (2). Lastly, unidentified seal and shark taxa represent 9.9% of all records.

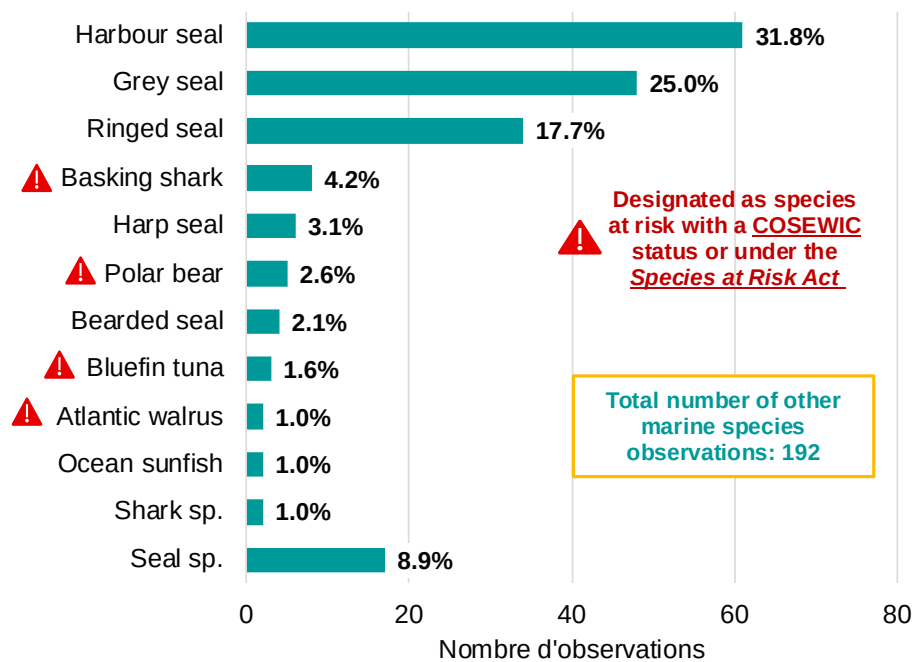


Figure 10. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of non-cetacean observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions in 2025

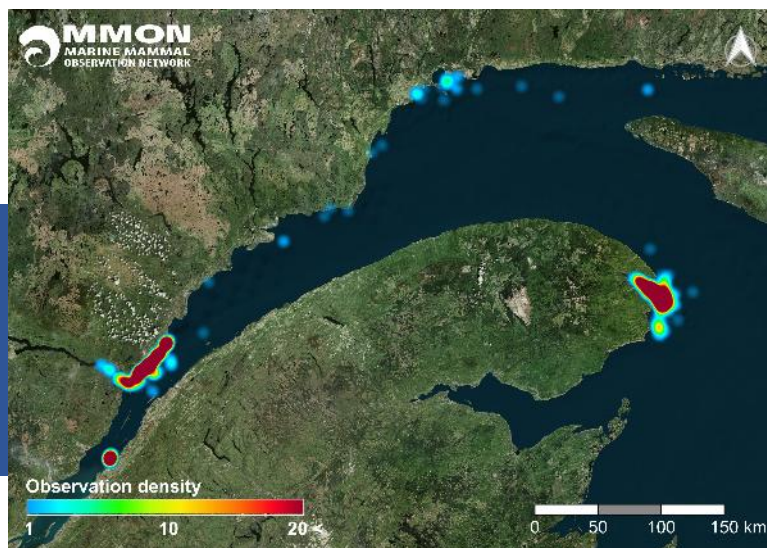


Group of grey seals © M. Côté, MMON

Observations from the St. Lawrence to the Arctic

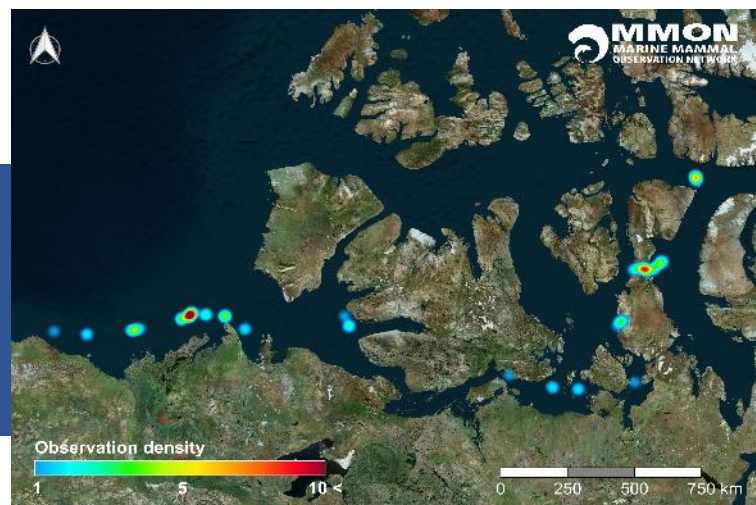
Observation data from providers of marine observation activities and institutions were collected in the St. Lawrence River (Map 3) and in the Northwest Passage in the Arctic (Map 4).

- The highest densities of observations can be seen in Map 3, namely in Gaspé Bay (372) and the Gulf of St. Lawrence near the Gaspé Peninsula (468), as well as in the St. Lawrence Estuary, notably in the Kamouraska Archipelago area (93) and the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park and its surroundings (609). These areas are known for their abundance of marine mammals during the summer months, a presence that whale-watching tour operators capitalize on. Other, more scattered observations were reported near the coasts along the entire northern shore of the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf.
- Several “hotspots” can be seen in the Arctic region (Map 4). The area with the highest density of observations is in the Beaufort Sea (38). There is also a localized hotspot near Bellot Strait and another one in Barrow Strait (8). The remaining observations (17) are more scattered between Larsen Sound and King William and Victoria islands, as well as in the Bering Strait.



Map 3. Density of observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions in 2025 – Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence

Map 4. Number of observations reported by organizers of marine observation activities and institutions in 2025 – Arctic



3.4. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS REPORTED BY CITIZENS IN 2025

Dedicated to Long-term Vitality

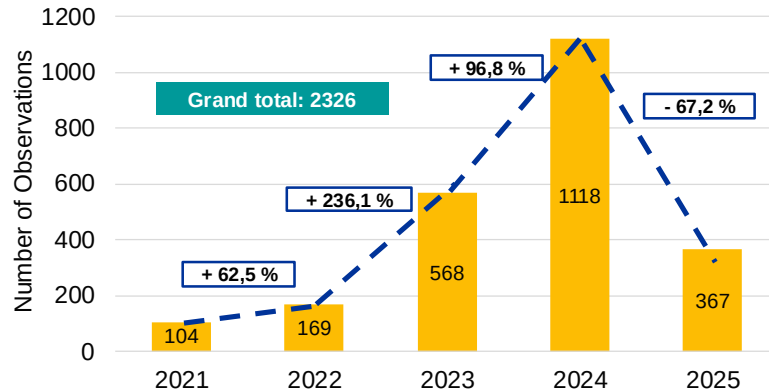


Figure 11. Evolution of number of citizen observations, 2021-2025



Since 2021, the Navigating Whale Habitat program has included a citizen science component that encourages members of the public to document their observations using the *Vigie Marine* tool. Figure 11 above shows how this participation has involved, peaking in 2024 with a high of 1,118 data points. Despite a decline in 2025 to 367 observations—a 67.2% drop compared to the previous year—citizen science remains a significant contributor. With a cumulative total of 2,326 observations to date, these data make a crucial contribution to a better understanding of marine mammal ecology.

To give new impetus to this participation, MMON recently upgraded *Vigie Marine* to better meet user needs and optimize the citizen science experience.

Implementation of personalized access during the upcoming season aims to simplify data entry and bolster community engagement.

As can be seen in Figure 12, citizen observations were collected every month of the year, confirming once again that marine mammals can be observed year-round. Nearly 15% of the data set (55 observations) was recorded outside the peak season, i.e. from October to April. Unsurprisingly, peak participation occurs during the boating season, when citizens take to the water or observe from shore or aboard ferries: June alone accounts for nearly a quarter of the 2025 observations, while July and August represent almost half (over 43%) of the data collected.

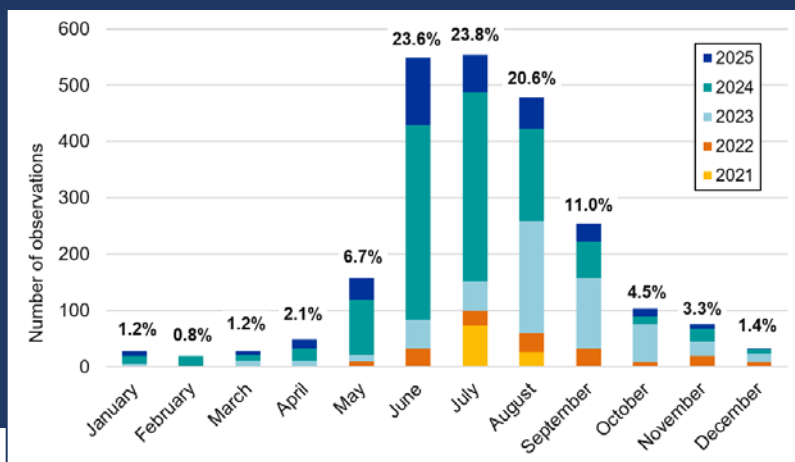


Figure 12. Monthly breakdown (numbers and percentages) of citizen observations in 2025

Broad Diversity of Species Observed

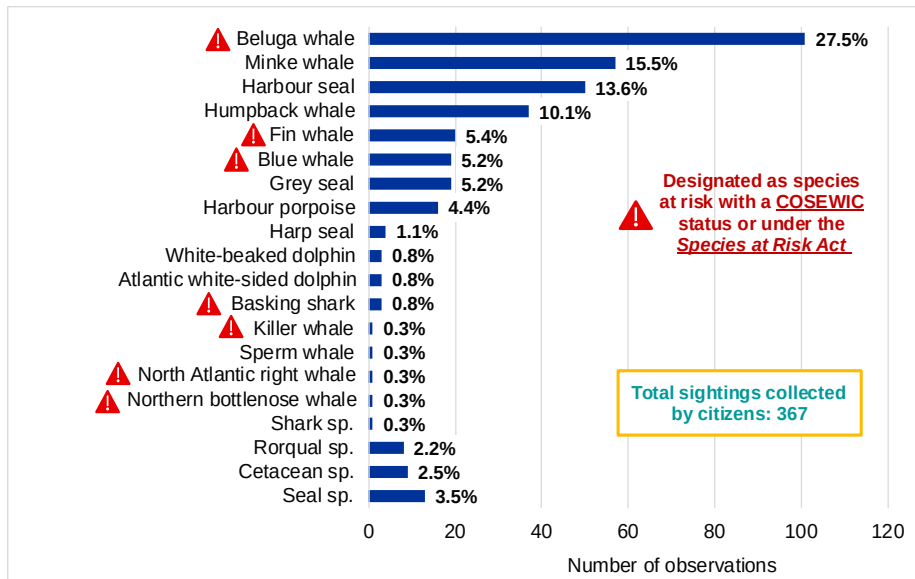


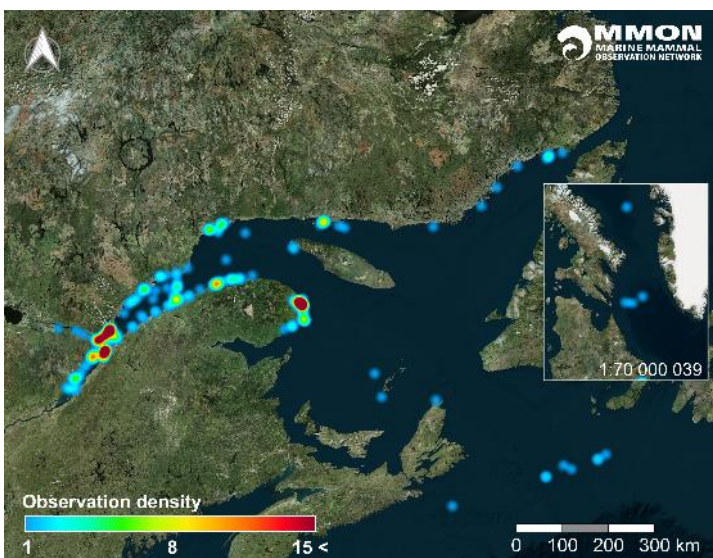
Figure 13. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of citizen observations in 2025



Figure 13 details the distribution of the 367 citizen observations collected in 2025 which represent 16 different species, 7 of which are protected. The majority of these data correspond to cetaceans, especially the beluga (101 observations), which alone accounts for more than a quarter of the total (27.5%). These are followed by the minke whale (57) and larger rorquals, including the humpback whale (37), fin whales (20), and blue whales (19). The harbour porpoise (16) rounds out this main grouping. As for pinnipeds, the harbour seal (50) and grey seal (19) together account for 18.8% of the sightings.

A number of rarer species (17 sightings) were also reported, including endangered species such as the North Atlantic right whale and the northern beaked whale. Lastly, species-level identification could not be made for 8.4% of the taxa reported (sharks, fin whales, cetaceans, or seals).

Map 5 shows the locations where the most citizen sightings were recorded. The largest areas of high-density sightings are found in the St. Lawrence Estuary, particularly around the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park (102) and near the shores of Rivière-du-Loup and Cacouna (45). Another hotspot is located near Gaspé Bay (69) in the Gaspé Peninsula. Observations in the St. Lawrence were recorded along the entire northern shore as far as east as Blanc-Sablon, in the Magdalen Islands, as well as off the coast of Cape Breton Island. A few data points were recorded by a citizen aboard an Arctic expedition in the Davis Strait.



Map 5. Density of citizen observations in 2025 – St. Lawrence and Arctic Sectors

3.5. SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF NAVIGATING WHALE HABITAT DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM IN 2025

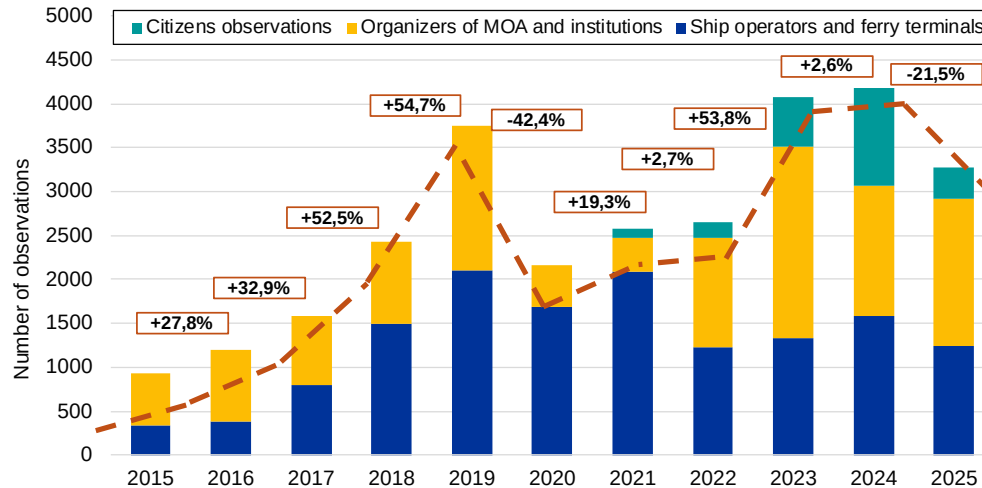


Figure 14. Evolution of data collection for marine mammals and other marine species by observer category, 2015-2025

Year after year, data collection under the Navigating Whale Habitat program continues to grow and has now reached a cumulative total of 28,818 observations (Figure 14). Observer members in the organizers of marine observation activities and institutions category logged 1,666 observations, which is comparable to the average over the previous three years (1,633), while ship operators and ferry terminals recorded a slightly lower figure in 2025 (1,246) than their 2022-2024 average (1,383). Citizen data collection has slowed, however, dropping from an average of 618 data points over the previous three years to 367 in 2025. The total data collected in 2025 by all observer categories combined was 3,279, down 21.5% compared to the 2024 total (4,178) and 9.8% below the 2022-2024 average.

Figure 15 below illustrates the contributions of each observer category since ordinary citizens first began contributing data in 2021. Compared to previous years, i) organizers of marine observation activities and institutions and ii) ship operators and ferry terminals made similar contributions proportion-wise, i.e. approximately 40% and 47%, respectively. However, the gap between their respective contributions is narrowing every year. The citizen science contribution has remained fairly stable over the years. The combined total of the three observer categories reached 3,279 data points in 2025. This figure is comparable to the results obtained in 2021 and 2022.

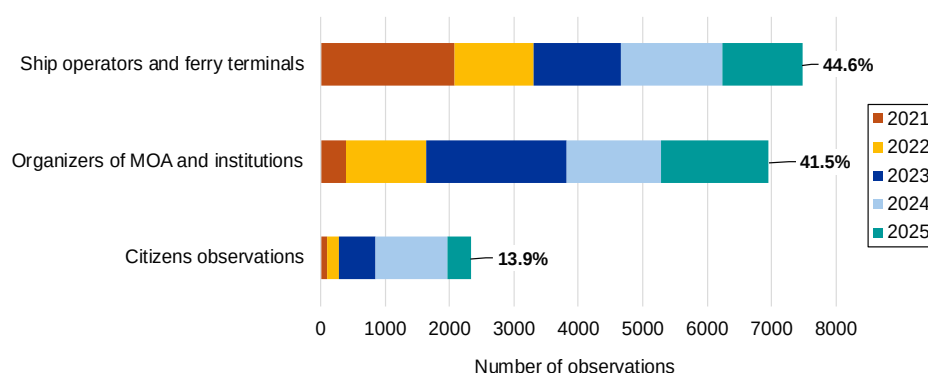


Figure 15. Numbers and proportions of observation data logged by each observer category, 2021-2025

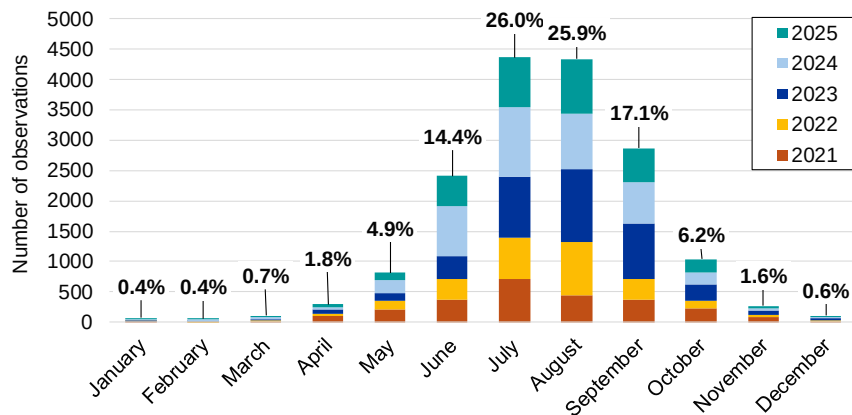


Figure 16. Monthly breakdown (numbers and percentages) of observations reported by all observer categories combined, 2021-2025

Figure 16 shows the monthly distribution of data collected over the past five years. For each of these years, the months of May to October account for 94.5% of all observation data. This period corresponds to both the peak season for marine mammals and the busiest period for certain organizers of marine observation activities that synchronize their operations to the whale-watching season, which means that the data set provided by other observer categories is augmented only these times of the year. Between 2021 and 2025, 5.5% of all data were collected during the off-season (November through April). This can be explained not only by a reduced presence of marine mammals during this period, but also by lower activity levels for each observer category. As a result, citizens and ship operators are essentially the only remaining contributors to data collection during such periods.

The data set compiled in 2025 by all participating members and citizens comprises 2,908 cetacean sightings representing 17 identified species and three non-specific taxa (Figure 17). The most frequently sighted species was the humpback whale (673), followed by the fin whale (442) and the minke whale (429). Within this diversity, there are also 10 species designated as endangered or of special concern. These species represent 44.3% of all sightings (1,289), with the fin whale (442), beluga (380), and harbour porpoises (252) accounting for the largest shares. Large cetaceans (1732) ranging from minke whales to blue whales are the most frequently sighted, accounting for 59.6% of the data set, while smaller species (828) (e.g. harbour porpoises, northern bottlenose whale) represent 28.5%. Lastly, the three generic taxa (cetacean sp., dolphin sp., and rorqual sp.) together account for 12.0% of the observations (348).

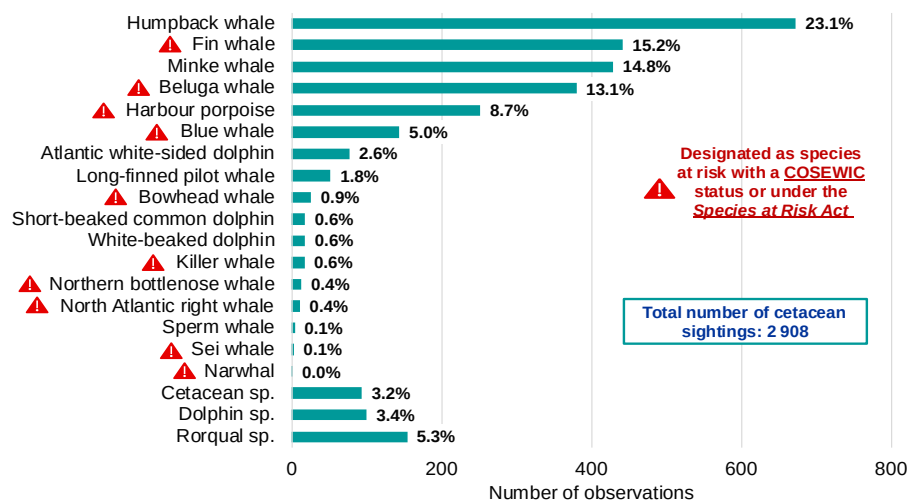


Figure 17. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of cetacean observations reported by all observer categories combined in 2025

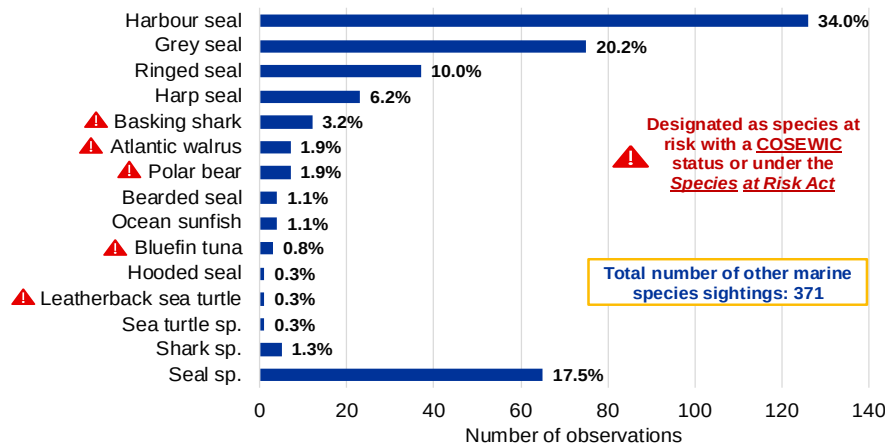


Figure 18. Species breakdown (numbers and percentages) of non-cetacean observations reported by all observer categories combined in 2025

Non-cetacean marine species recorded are shown in Figure 18. Seals dominate the data set, accounting for 71.7% of the total 371 recorded observations. This group is primarily made up of the harbour seal (126), grey seal (75), and ringed seals (37), followed by the harp seal (23), bearded seals (4), and hooded seals (1). Other caniforms, namely the Atlantic walrus (7) and polar bear (7), account for 3.8% of the observations. Fish represent 5.1% of the data, with records of basking sharks (12), ocean sunfish (4), and Atlantic bluefin tuna (3), while the leatherback turtle was observed only once. Lastly, non-specific taxa account for 19.1% of observations.

Figure 19 illustrates the evolution of observations of the ten most frequently recorded species over the past five years. Humpback whales and belugas, despite exhibiting significant interannual variability, consistently rank among the four most frequently observed species. Minke whales show relative stability, notwithstanding a decrease from 559 observations in 2024 to 429 in 2025, while harbour porpoises plateaued between 2022 and 2024, followed by a decline in 2025. Fin whales and blue whales experienced an initial decline followed by a gradual increase since 2022; in 2025, fin whales became the second most frequently observed species. Conversely, the long-finned pilot whale population has shown a steady decline since 2021. Sightings of dolphins (Atlantic white-sided, white-beaked and short-beaked common) and killer whales, on the other hand, have been relatively stable from year to year.

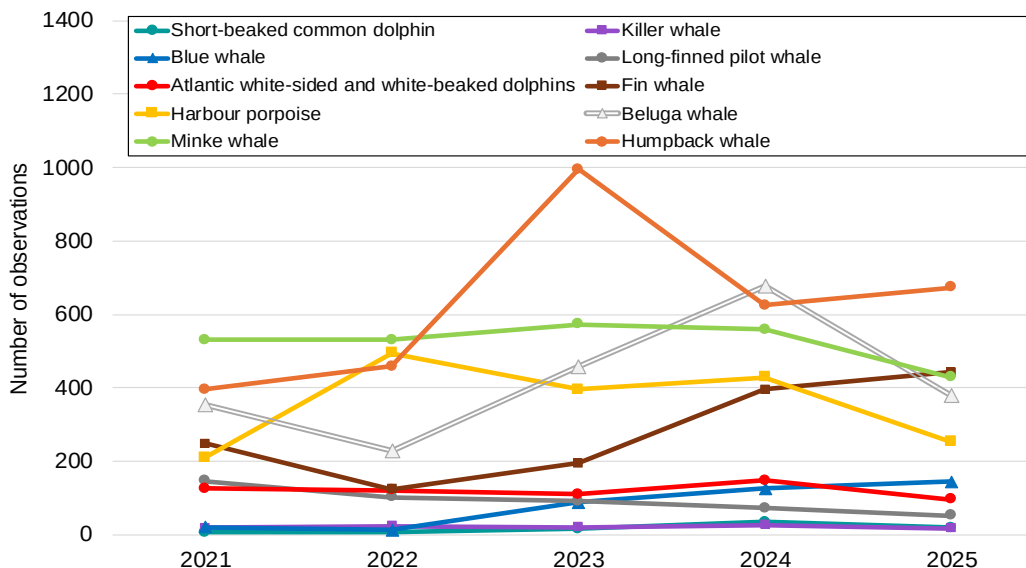
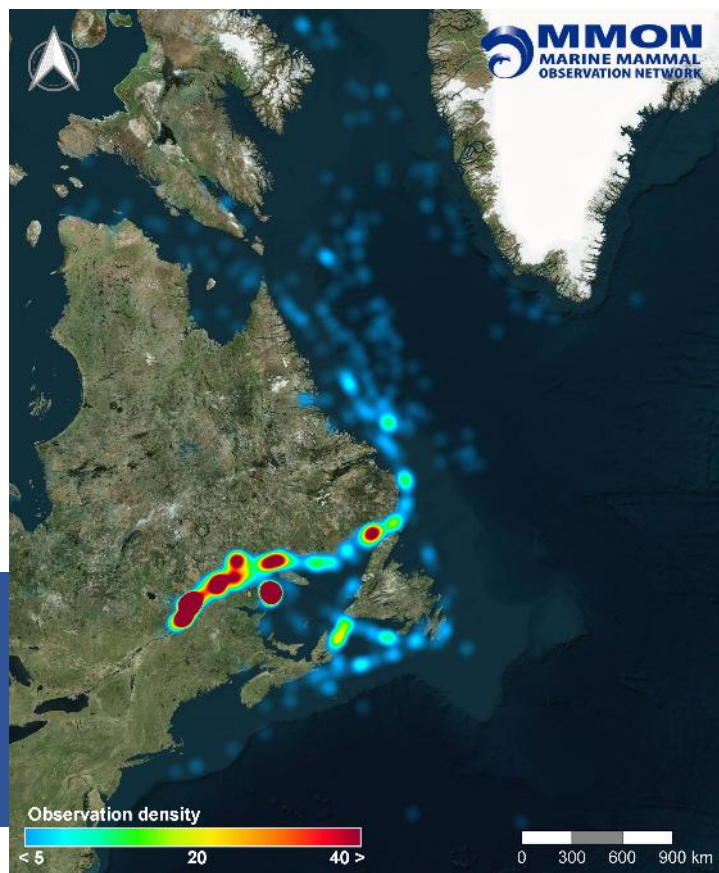


Figure 19. Evolution of the number of observations reported for main species, all observer categories combined, 2021-2025

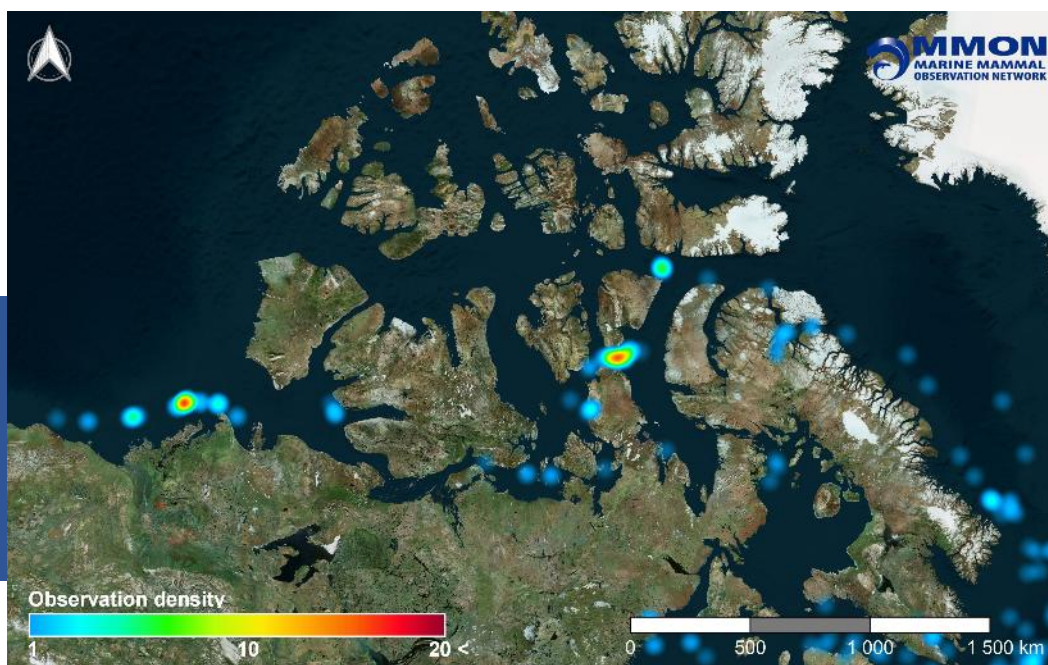


Presence Across a Vast Territory



Maps 6 and 7 illustrate the entire data set logged by all observer categories in 2025. As in previous years, the highest concentrations are found in eastern Canada and the Arctic, particularly in the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf, where the *Vigie Marine* app is well established and observer members make most of their trips. Observations are also scattered throughout the Atlantic Ocean and in the seas and straits of the Arctic.

Carte 7. Density of observations collected by all observer categories combined in 2025 - Canadian east coast and North Atlantic.



Carte 8. Density of observations collected by all observer categories combined in 2025 - Arctic.

CONCLUSION

The Navigating Whale Habitat training and data collection program continues to grow and become more robust. In the 2025-2026 season, the network reached 33 members with a signed collaboration agreement, including representatives of the maritime industry, organizers of marine observation activities as well as institutions and conservation parks. This broadening of the participant base, combined with ongoing recruitment and outreach efforts, ensures wider geographic representation for data collection and maximizes the impact of the program's awareness-raising activities.

In parallel, MMON continued to enhance the tools available to members and the general public, notably through the *Vigie Marine* online platform and data entry and visualization application. To modernize its architecture, enhance the user experience, and facilitate feedback to observers, the tool underwent a major overhaul at the end of the 2025-2026 fiscal year, officially launching at the start of the 2026 season. These developments support the gradual shift to digital data entry, making data collection more efficient, structured, and accessible.

The season was also marked by the continuation and consolidation of the Sentinels of the St. Lawrence project and the interpretive toolkit, initiatives that boost opportunities for outreach and citizen science in the field, particularly on ferries and at events. The integration of a map of onshore observation sites aims to promote low-impact whale watching from land. Lastly, MMON continued its efforts to encourage data collection by members and the public through training, technical support, and direct follow-ups in order to foster the adoption of tools and maintain long-term interest in documenting observations.

Lastly, observers of the Navigating Whale Habitat program contributed 3,279 observation data for marine mammals and other marine species in the 2025 data collection. Although the results from the i) ship operator / ferry terminal and ii) citizen categories show a dip in the size of their respective data sets in 2025, those from organizers of marine observation activities and institutions are trending upward. Constituting over 23% of reported observations, the humpback whale topped the rankings in 2025, followed by the fin whale and minke whale, each of which accounts for approximately 15% of data. While the geographic distribution of observations is particularly concentrated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence Estuary, it does extend to Arctic seas and straits as well as into the Atlantic Ocean. Thanks to the commitment of citizens and observers, the historical, cumulative database has grown to 28,818 observations. Next target: 30,000 for 2026!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our financial partners, each of the program's members, and all of the ordinary citizens who help document the presence of marine mammals in our waters! Your participation represents an invaluable contribution for their conservation.