



2025  
**IMPACT REPORT**





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# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

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Welcome to our first impact report! As Whale Wise continues to grow, we are excited to showcase our expanding conservation work, from winter fieldwork in Iceland's most remote fjords to a citizen science community thousands strong. We hope you enjoy reading about our progress.

2025 was an exciting and unique year for Whale Wise. Extending our research to all seasons, we discovered diverse cetacean hotspots and documented unexpected behaviours, from the remote Westfjords to the near-pristine Northeast Iceland.

We remain the only organisation carrying out coastal research in East Iceland and consistent monitoring in the Westfjords – collecting data where no one else does, often via land-based drone operations.

As whales continue to face an increasingly busy ocean, our ongoing scientific research to better understand the complex relationship between humans and whales feels more important than ever.

2025 has been a record year for Whale Wise, driven by successful fundraising. As an volunteer-led organisation, securing sustainable funding remains a priority, and we're excited to build on this momentum in 2026.

**Thank you for supporting Whale Wise. Together, we can protect whales, restore balance to our oceans and inspire change that lasts.**

*Alyssa & Tom*

**Alyssa & Tom**  
Co-Founders, Whale Wise



# OUR STORY SO FAR

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From the very beginning, we knew that protecting whales would take a team. Whale Wise was built on friendships spanning more than a decade. We began our research in Iceland in 2018 and have been a charity for the last four years. Our core team came together through a shared love for whales, bringing together close friends who met through their collective passion for conservation.



Since then, our team has grown, and so has the community standing behind our mission. Together, we are stronger. Together, we can be a voice for the whales and create an ocean where they can thrive.



# OUR MISSION

*We envision an ocean where both whales and humans can thrive.*

Whale Wise is dedicated to advancing marine mammal conservation through scientific research, advocacy and public engagement.

We aim to promote and inform the sustainable use of our ocean in a way that centres the protection of whales and all marine mammals.



**631** humpback whales identified since 2018  
with a record-breaking **256** documented in 2025

## THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

- Quantify and communicate **real threats** to whale populations such as entanglement in fishing gear
- Advance scientific evidence to drive **informed conservation and policy change**
- Build data resources from **citizen science** that are costly or impossible for standard research teams to compile alone
- Give whales a voice through **storytelling** that connects and engages stakeholders with our mission



*“Hey, I’m **Droplet**, the newest whale to the Whale Wise catalogue. I am the calf of Teadrop, an older female that returns to Iceland each year. I was sighted in the Westfjords in November 2025 and I hope to return next year, this time all by myself. Thankfully, the Whale Wise team photographed my fluke (not often possible for a small calf!) so they can keep tracking my adventures!”*

# A YEAR OF DISCOVERY

2025 was a year of new scientific discoveries for the Whale Wise team. We've broadened our understanding of whale ecology in Icelandic waters – information which is crucial to both mitigate local disturbance and understand the scale of global threats.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Continued monitoring of humpback whales in Ísafjarðardjúp revealed very high residency, with **over 150 individuals tracked**.



## WHY IT MATTERS

Ísafjarðardjúp is an area of **rapidly growing human activity** – from cruise ships to aquaculture and even seabed mining. Simultaneously, it appears to be a **critical foraging area** for humpback whales – perhaps the most important in coastal Iceland – and is home to a growing whale-watching industry that supports local economies.

Recent marine management plans have failed to incorporate whale data. By developing long-term data sets, we can identify times and areas where human activities can minimise impact to whales.



Every year, additional data collection helps to grow our data sets and increase our scientific power to inform Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and proper management such as rerouting shipping traffic or limiting underwater mining activities.

Our data have already supported a proposal to develop Ísafjarðardjúp into a whale sanctuary, in direct response to recently granted local whaling permits.





“My name is **Birch!** Whale Wise sighted me on 50 different days this year, the most of any whale and a record for Whale Wise across all years. It’s no surprise though – the team observed whales for nearly 600 hours, and across every month in 2025.”

## WHAT WE FOUND

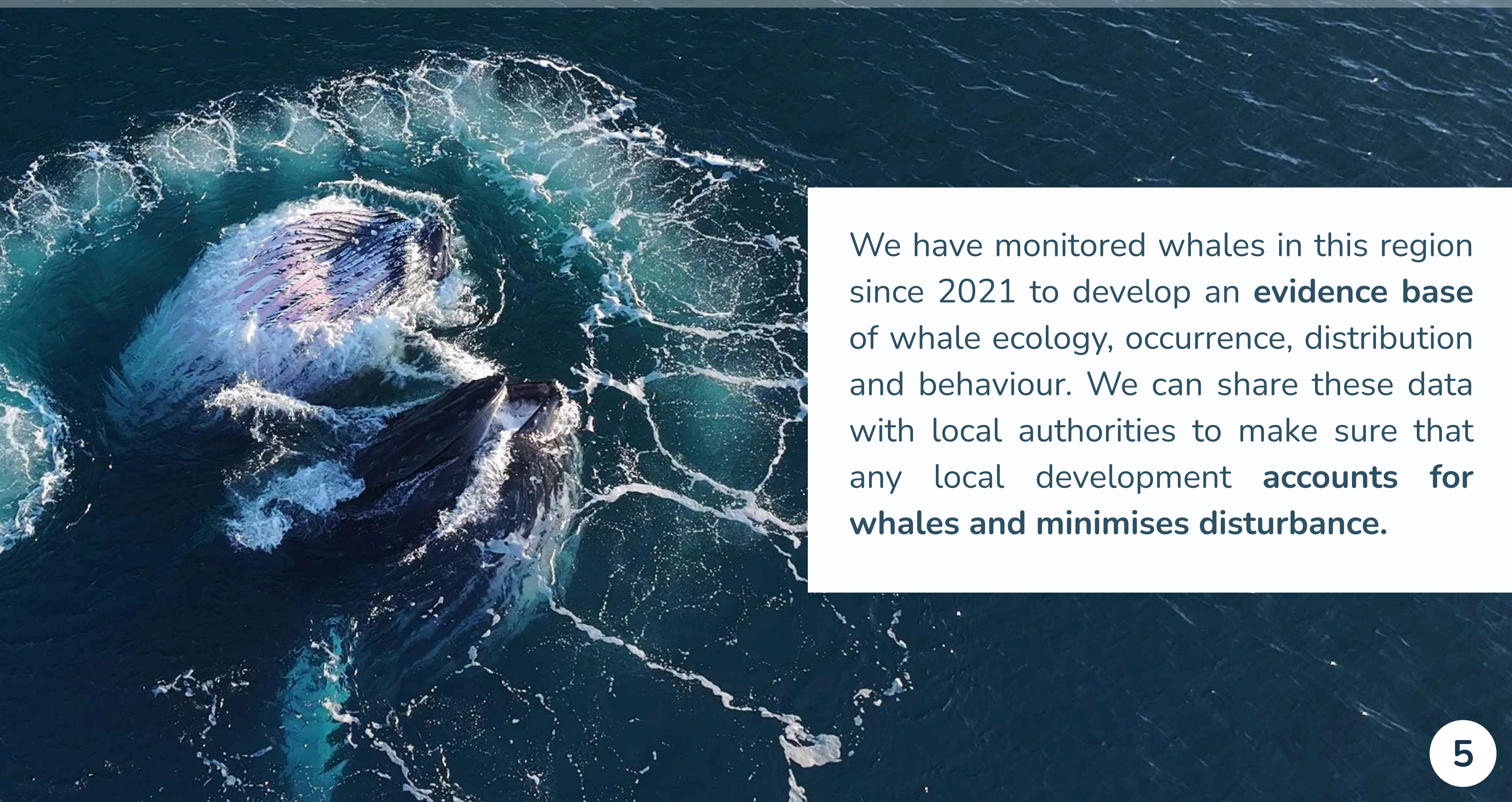
Aggregations of **bubble-net feeding** humpbacks in East Iceland (Finnafjörður, April 2025).



## WHY IT MATTERS

The far Northeast of Iceland is a remote area with relatively limited human activity. However, all of this is set to change with the **scheduled construction of the largest port in Iceland** in Finnafjörður, where there is currently no coastal infrastructure.

Bubble-net feeding is a **rare behaviour in Iceland** that involves humpback whales creating rings of bubbles to catch their prey. These behaviours are likely sensitive to disturbance and provide evidence of **critical habitat importance**. 30 bubble-net feeding humpbacks is a very large number for coastal Iceland, suggesting that this area may be seasonally important for foraging whales.



We have monitored whales in this region since 2021 to develop an **evidence base** of whale ecology, occurrence, distribution and behaviour. We can share these data with local authorities to make sure that any local development **accounts for whales and minimises disturbance**.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Fresh wounds revealed that several of our ‘whale friends’, including Glacier and Comb, suffered from **entanglement in fishing gear** throughout 2025. Additional whales sighted throughout the year, like Hope, bore the marks of past, prolonged entanglement events.



## WHY IT MATTERS

These whales are regulars in the Westfjords – we know their habits, movement patterns, health and even personalities. Documenting these entanglement events **removes the anonymity from this major welfare issue**. These aren't statistics, they're **whales we know by name**. It's this relationship that enables us to tell compelling stories of individual, well-known whales to better engage the public with what can be distressing, off-putting content.

Sadly, at least a **quarter of Icelandic humpbacks have been entangled in fishing gear**. Documenting these cases helps us to understand where and when whales are getting entangled, and thereby map local sources of a **global population threat**. In the future, building an entanglement data set could allow us to pinpoint which fishing methods are driving entanglement and thus inform targeted conservation strategies such as specific fisheries closures.

“I’m **Valentine**, a young humpback whale. Whale Wise sighted me nearly every month between Feb 12<sup>th</sup> and November 29<sup>th</sup> – always in the fjord system of Ísafjarðardjúp, suggesting that I was consistently present for nearly the entire year. Sightings like mine highlight that humpbacks spend long periods of time foraging in the area and are effectively resident. This is a key determinant of habitat importance.”



## WHAT WE FOUND

100+ humpbacks documented in November in Ísafjarðardjúp – a huge increase from 60 in October and the highest number we've ever seen in this location.



## WHY IT MATTERS

While human activity is relatively low during winter, these observations help us to understand the times and places that are most critical for foraging whales, to identify which might need the most protection. We pushed our 2025 Westfjords field season into early December, after local reports suggested this might be an important foraging season for humpbacks – a final meal before their long migration southwards to their tropical breeding grounds, where they can spend several months without any food.

Brutal weather conditions and almost constant darkness mean winter whale research in the Icelandic Westfjords remains extremely limited yet critical for the whales.

In September we started using a new laser system to measure whale length, co-developed with [Tandem Ventures](#).

Using [WHASER](#), we measured **150 whales** in four months – a large-scale humpback health assessment.



## WHAT WE FOUND

Consistent presence of **orcas, sperm and fin whales** in the eastern Westfjords (Strandir, March–April 2025).



## WHY IT MATTERS

Local knowledge indicates that the large bay of Húnaflói is likely an important foraging ground for whales, but until now there has been no scientific evidence to support this. Between March and April, we unexpectedly documented large numbers of orcas, sperm and fin whales here, in this remote eastern coast of the Westfjords. This surprisingly high diversity of large cetaceans in the area – possibly foraging on capelin and lumpfish – underscores our limited understanding of whale ecology in the area.

As fisheries and vessel traffic expand regionally, characterising whale diversity in the region will help us understand the importance of potential protective measures such as fisheries regulation and protected areas. If we don't know what marine life is there, we are unable to protect it in the future.



**Both local knowledge and scientific evidence are critical to whale conservation.**

Local knowledge provides community-centred, long-term perspectives on the lives of whales. Scientific research then enables systematic documentation of whale populations and human threats. **Both knowledge sources are essential – they complement and enhance each other in our mission to protect whales.**

# BEYOND THE WATER

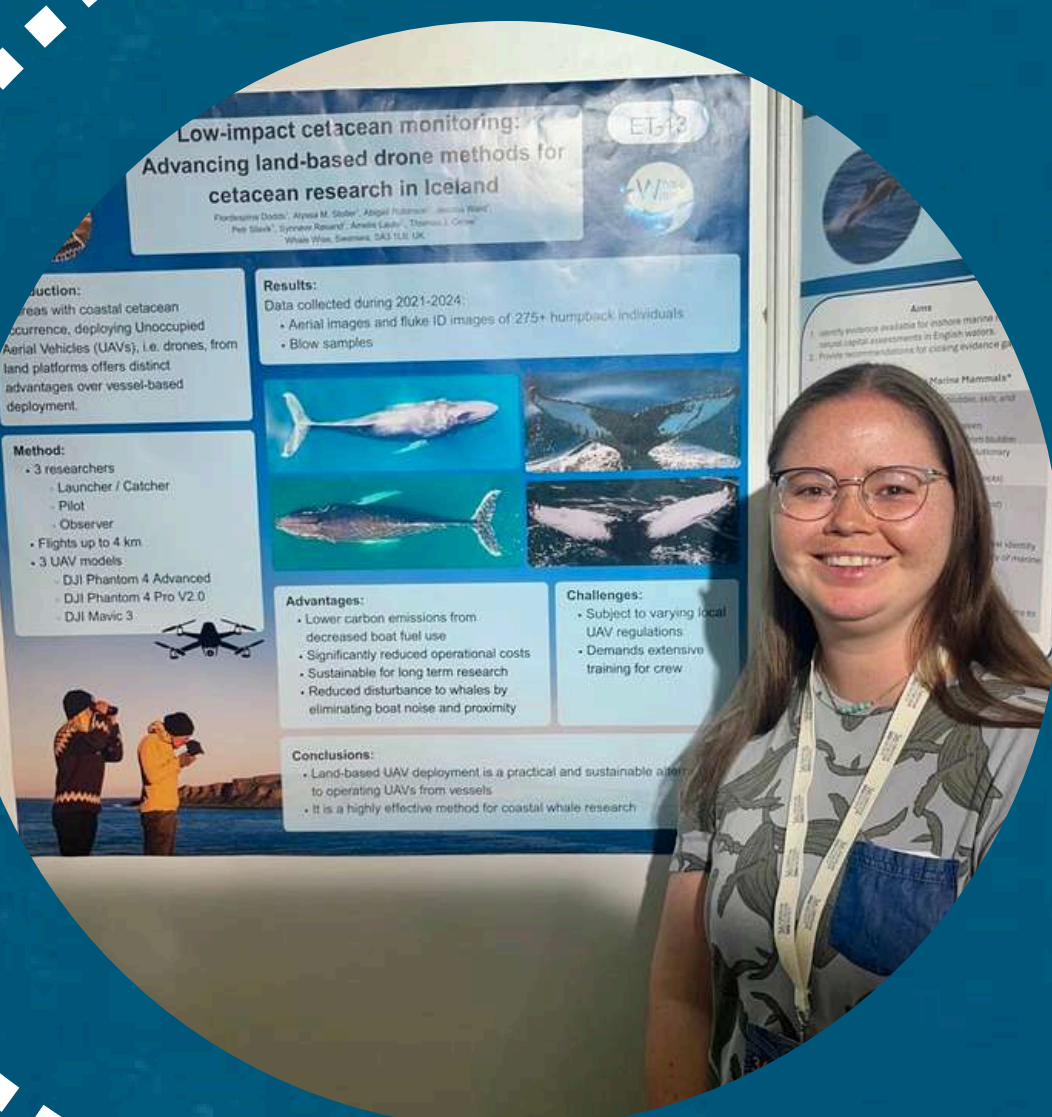
Whilst our science and discoveries take place in the big blue, none of this would be possible without commitment and community on land. Here are some of our highlights beyond the water:

**2,000** new members joined our Icelandic whale sightings community in 2025 to better understand whale distribution and behaviour in Iceland. Turning whale research into an open, inclusive community of residents and visitors both enhances our understanding of whales and makes the field of whale research more equitable.



**Rebecca Douglas** joined our Board as President. A professional visual storyteller dedicated to rewilding our connection with the natural world, Rebecca brings inspiration and focus to our storytelling along with business acumen and strategic thinking to her role of President.

We were nominated as a **1% for the Planet** environmental partner by Sarah Hakewill from Sea of Purpose. Joining this global network connects us with impact-driven businesses who want to contribute to whale and marine conservation.



We shared our work with the global whale research community through **10 posters and presentations at international whale research conferences**. Solving global threats to whales requires international collaboration as well as local action. Sharing our work in this way also invites feedback from the global research community, ensuring our work continues to innovate.



Our short film **Waves of Ink** about our research in East Iceland, was awarded Best Film at both the **European Cetacean Society Conference** and **SCINEMA International Science Film Festival**. Both were able to share the film with a wider audience, including numerous school students.



Inspiring the next generation of scientists – we **hosted and advised seven Master's students** in 2025, offering internships and thesis projects that answer critical conservation questions, helping to nurture the next generation of whale scientists.

Volunteers contributed **530 working days** to our mission – demonstrating the incredible commitment to whale conservation by our core team, interns and students.



# WORKING TOWARDS A SAFER, MORE SECURE FUTURE FOR WHALES

Donations and partnerships continue to support our work to better understand the lives of whales. Businesses, individuals and communities are all contributing to whale conservation. If you'd like to join them, here's how you can support our work.

## FOR INDIVIDUALS...

### Adopt a whale

Get to know a humpback whale and make a positive difference in its future.

### Become a monthly donor

Help to sustain our growth and take a deeper dive into Whale Wise stories.

### One-time donation

If you're keen to donate but are unable to make a long-term commitment, we are grateful for any one-off donations we receive, no matter how small.

## FOR BUSINESSES...

### Become a corporate sponsor

We are excited to develop long-term partnerships with businesses, nurturing reciprocal relationships where we can grow our impact together.

### Choose us as your 1% for the Planet environmental partner

If you care about innovation in whale conservation, partnering with us can help your business fulfil its environmental commitments and protect whales.



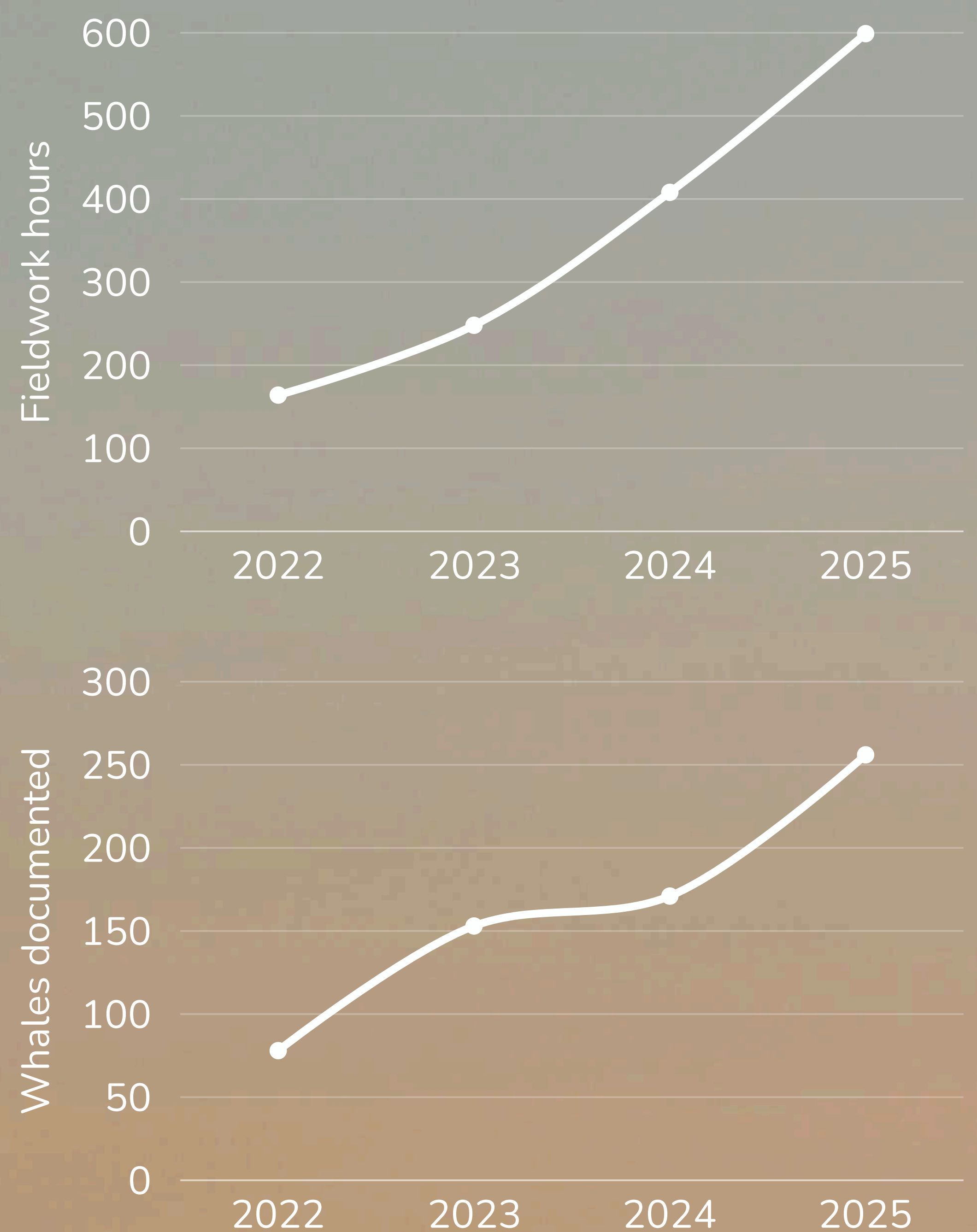
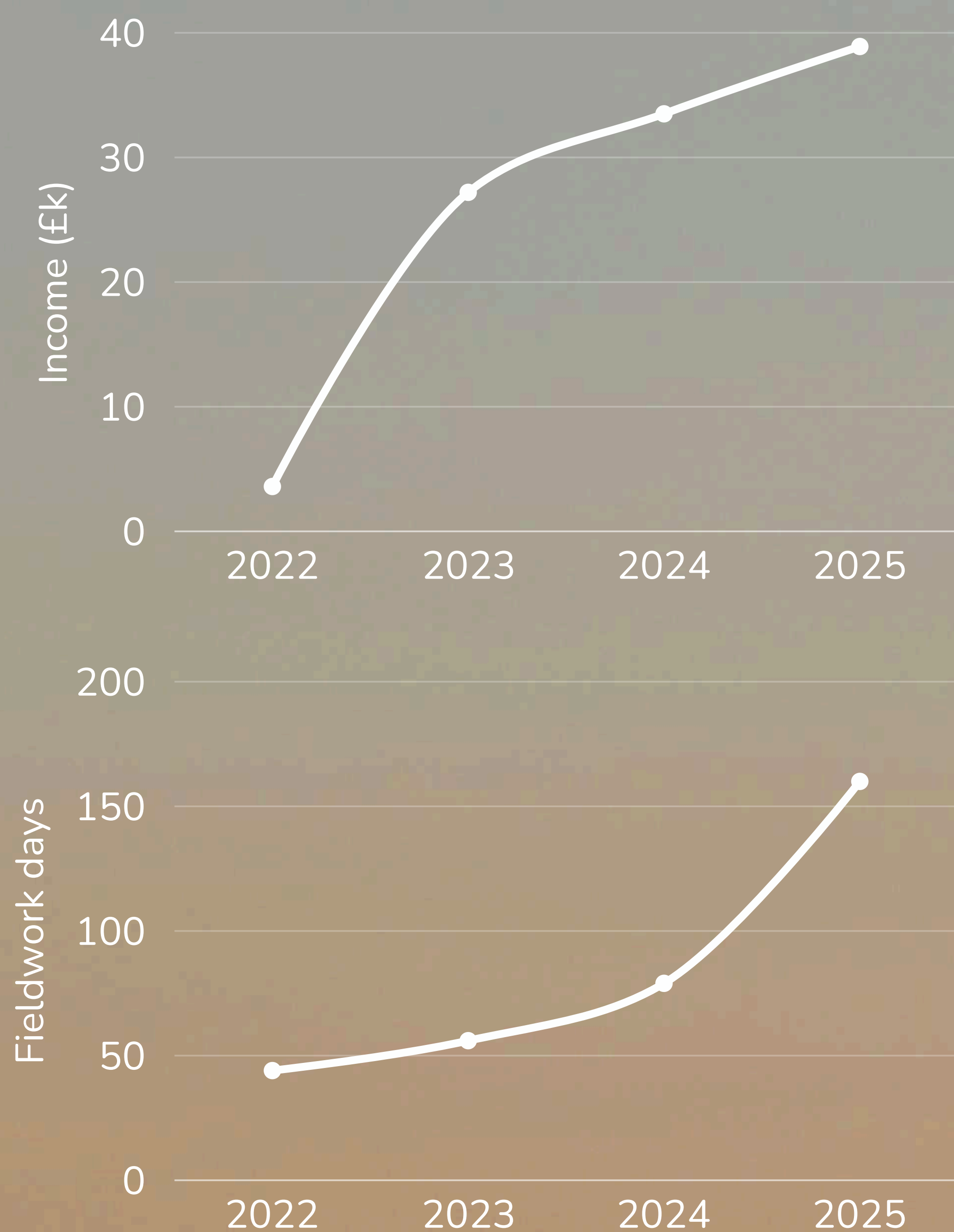
## Whilst donations are critical to our work, you can advocate for Whale Wise in other ways:

Sign up to our newsletter. Be the first to hear about exciting Whale Wise developments and receive exclusive monthly updates about our work.

Follow us on social media @whalewise and share our work. Every time someone shares our work, our message reaches further and connects with new people.

# OUR IMPACT OVER TIME

The results are clear – growing support has elevated our research and monitoring efforts. Thanks to sustained growth in funding and logistical support, we are collecting more vital data than ever before, shedding light on critical marine conservation issues.



In 2026, we aim to continue this growing trend – supporting more time in the field to expand our research and maintaining a suite of cutting-edge scientific equipment to invest in the future of Whale Wise.

We are grateful for our fiscal partnership with [The Biodiversity Group](#), a 501(c)(3) organisation, which allows us to receive US tax-deductible funding.



The  
**BIODIVERSITY  
GROUP**

# LOOKING FORWARD

Building on an exciting year, we're focused on these ambitions for 2026

## Maintain data collection throughout the entire year

Following some exciting and surprising sightings – from large numbers of humpbacks to unexpected hotspots of sperm, orca and fin whales – we want to increase our focus on data collection during spring, autumn and winter to improve our understanding of Iceland's marine systems.

## Scaling our impact

Our biggest challenge as a small, emerging charity is funding. 2025 was a year of important scientific discoveries and we have big ambitions to keep building on that foundational research to help protect whales. We are looking at more ways to increase our funding in 2026.



## Create a deeper understanding & relationship with the humpback whales of the Westfjords

We are starting to better understand their behavioural patterns, life histories and movements, which helps us to tell their story and better protect the whales.



# A HEARTFELT THANKS



**Every whale we've documented has a name, a story and a future worth protecting.**

Each data point, drone flight, acoustic recording, photograph and community conversation matters. Every time we study these whales we learn more about them, the threats to their existence, and how we can best help them. That's only possible because people like you believe in what we're doing.

2025 has shown us what's possible. 2026 gives us an opportunity to build on that momentum.

Whether you've partnered with us, donated, followed our journey, shared our work or simply read this impact report – thank you. You're part of our mission to protect whales and the marine environments they call home. Together, we can make that happen.



If you'd like to support our research in 2026 and beyond, we'd love to hear from you. Contact Tom or Alyssa at [info@whalewise.org](mailto:info@whalewise.org) for more information.



This impact report was co-created with Sarah Hakewill from [Sea of Purpose](#), our 1% for the Planet business partner.