

# Dr. M. Michael Poole: Whale & Dolphin Research and Conservation Highlights

A guest-friendly summary of the most interesting scientific and conservation work connected to dolphins and whales at Moorea and French Polynesia.

## Executive Summary

Dr. M. Michael Poole's research is especially valuable for Green Lodge because it connects Moorea's natural beauty with real science: resident spinner dolphin communities, endangered humpback whale breeding habitat, whale song culture, and broad marine mammal protection across French Polynesia.

**The strongest story: guests are not just visiting paradise - they are entering the world's largest national marine mammal sanctuary, shaped by decades of field research and conservation work.**

## Most Interesting Research & Findings

### 1. French Polynesia is a humpback whale breeding ground

Dr. Poole discovered and proved that some humpback whales use French Polynesian waters as a breeding ground. This was unknown before his research, and it gives Moorea a deeper conservation identity: whales travel here to rest, breed, nurse calves, and continue a South Pacific migration cycle.

### 2. A whale and dolphin sanctuary across French Polynesia

After years of Dr. Poole's research and advocacy, in 2002 French Polynesia passed his draft legislation to make a sanctuary for whales and dolphins across its Exclusive Economic Zone, the world's largest national marine mammal sanctuary. This is the most powerful conservation achievement connected to his work.

### 3. Long-term spinner dolphin research at Moorea and Tahiti

His Ph.D. research focused on spinner dolphins around Moorea and Tahiti, based on years of field study. This makes his work central to understanding Moorea's local dolphin communities. Since then, some of his own students have obtained their Masters and Ph.D. degrees based on Moorea's spinners.

### 4. Spinner dolphins behave like neighborhood communities

A peer-reviewed study co-authored by Poole found that spinner dolphins in the Society Islands form small, relatively distinct island communities. Around Moorea, he and his colleagues calculated about 150 dolphins, with some individuals recognized and followed across many years.

### 5. Humpback whale songs move across the South Pacific from eastern Australia to South America

Over the last 15 years Dr. Poole has co-authored several papers on humpback whale song. These studies show songs spread culturally between whale populations, almost like human musical trends or fashion modes, crossing the ocean over a period of years from one population to another.

### 6. First French Polynesian whale and dolphin sighting/stranding network

In 1988, he established a sighting and stranding network that gathered records for more than 20 cetacean species across more than 30 islands throughout French Polynesia's five archipelagoes.

## 7. Earlier gray whale migration research

Before his French Polynesia work, Poole's Master's Degree research identified the previously unknown route and timing used by gray whale mothers and calves migrating north along the central California coast.

## Best “Wow Facts” for Guests

- Moorea is home for resident spinner dolphins all year round; some individuals have been recognized and followed for many years.
- French Polynesia is a humpback whale resting, breeding and nursery ground.
- Humpback whales have culture: humpback songs can travel across the Pacific between populations.
- Dr. Poole's research and conservation efforts were responsible for sanctuary-level protection given to whales and dolphins across all of French Polynesia.
- His research in Moorea and French Polynesia dates back to 1987, giving guests access to nearly four decades of local marine mammal knowledge. And in 1992 he created French Polynesia's first dolphin and whale watching boat tours; these tours help fund his current scientific research and conservation efforts.

## Suggested Green Lodge Marketing Language

**At Green Lodge Moorea, guests are not just watching dolphins and whales - they are entering one of the world's great marine mammal sanctuaries, shaped by decades of research from Dr. Michael Poole. His work helped reveal Moorea's resident spinner dolphin communities, French Polynesia's role as a humpback whale breeding ground, and the extraordinary fact that whale songs culturally travel across the Pacific.**

## How Green Lodge Can Use This

| Use Case           | Message                                                                                        |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Guest welcome card | “You are staying beside waters that are home to resident dolphins and seasonal humpback whale  |
| Excursion sales    | “Go beyond whale watching - experience Moorea through decades of marine mammal research.”      |
| Website copy       | “Moorea is not only beautiful; it is scientifically important.”                                |
| Conservation story | “Your stay supports a destination where marine mammals are studied, respected, and protected.” |

## Sources to Cite / Verify

- Center for Whale Research profile: “Collaborating Scientist: Michael Poole” - [whaleresearch.org](http://whaleresearch.org); Oregon State University Marine Mammal Institute French Polynesia Project - [mmi.oregonstate.edu](http://mmi.oregonstate.edu)
- Marine Ecology Progress Series paper: “Isolation and interchange among insular spinner dolphin communities in the South Pacific revealed by individual identification and genetic diversity” <https://doi.org/10.3354/meps336275>
- Current Biology paper: “Dynamic horizontal cultural transmission of humpback whale song at the ocean basin scale” <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2011.03.019> and Royal Society Open Science paper: “Humpback whale song revolutions continue to spread from the central into the eastern South Pacific” <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.220158>
- Note: This PDF summarizes publicly described research and conservation work. For scientific or legal publication, verify exact claims against the original papers and institutional profiles.