



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Endangered Hawaiian monk seals released back to Laysan Island after rehabilitation at Ke Kai Ola, a dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai'i Island

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i – June 27, 2019) – Two Hawaiian monk seal pups rescued on Laysan Island last September have been released back to the wild after successful rehabilitation at Ke Kai Ola, The Marine Mammal Center's hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal.

"Both Maiapilo and 'Ākulikuli were prematurely weaned pups that would have died without intervention," says Dr. Claire Simeone, the Center's Hospital Director at Ke Kai Ola. "For endangered species in particular, every individual is critical so we are thrilled that they have learned the skills needed to successfully forage and have a second chance at life to help boost the monk seal population."

Maiapilo and 'Ākulikuli were returned to Laysan Island via the Oscar Elton Sette, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research vessel. Both seals were fitted with new satellite tags aboard the ship so that researchers can monitor them post-release. Since their release, their satellite tags have shown that Maiapilo has been traveling around the atoll, while 'Ākulikuli has stayed near shore. Both seals have been frequently sighted by field campers stationed on Laysan Island.

"Decades of research on Hawaiian monk seals by our partners at NOAA show that as malnourished pups, both of these seals would have had little to no chance of survival on their own," says Dr. Simeone. "The ability to release Maiapilo and 'Ākulikuli back to their ocean home highlights the critical role that rehabilitation plays in the conservation of this endangered species."

Over the course of their rehabilitation, Maiapilo gained a remarkable 220 pounds and 'Ākulikuli, who was also treated for a mouth ulcer and facial lacerations, gained more than 125 pounds.

Hawaiian monk seal RH38 continues to progress during her rehabilitation at Ke Kai Ola. She was diagnosed in late April with muscle damage due to an unknown trauma, which led to widespread infection and organ damage. RH38 recently shed her fur and top layer of skin in a process known as a "molt," which is an important signal that her body condition is improving and resuming natural functions.

The Marine Mammal Center's work in Hawai'i is dedicated to the conservation of Hawaiian monk seals. The Center is a member of the Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network and is responsible for monitoring the seals that haul out on Hawai'i Island. The Center's marine science program, Nā Kōkua o ke Kai, serves students in grades 6 through 8 and their teachers on Hawai'i Island.

The Marine Mammal Center has rehabilitated 27 monk seals since opening Ke Kai Ola in 2014. The Center is proud to partner with NOAA to support conservation efforts for the Hawaiian monk seal. NOAA researchers estimate the current monk seal population to be about 1,400 animals, and about 30

percent of those monk seals are alive today directly due to conservation efforts led by NOAA and its partners.

HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP

Members of the public should keep a safe distance from monk seals and report sightings on Hawai'i Island to the Center's response team at the 24-hour hotline: 808-987-0765. On other islands, report monk seal sightings to NOAA's statewide toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

Volunteers are needed at the Kona hospital and visitor center in a variety of roles, including community engagement, response, education and animal care. Interested individuals should visit MarineMammalCenter.org/KKO-volunteer to learn more about the opportunities available.

ABOUT THE MARINE MAMMAL CENTER

The Marine Mammal Center is guided and inspired by a shared vision of a healthy ocean for marine mammals and humans alike. Its mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education. As the world's largest marine mammal hospital, the Center is a global leader in marine mammal health, science and conservation.

In 2014, the Center opened Ke Kai Ola, a hospital and visitor center dedicated to the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i. Its academic year-long marine science and ocean conservation program, Nā Kōkua o ke Kai, engages middle-school youth and teachers through classroom work, field trips and professional development for teachers.

For more information, please visit MarineMammalCenter.org. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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