



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i – August 2, 2019) – Hawaiian monk seal RH38 has been successfully released back to the wild for the second time on Kaua'i after 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.

RH38 had two rehabilitation stints at The Marine Mammal Center. She was originally admitted to Ke Kai Ola in August of 2017 for malnutrition and a heavy parasite load. During this second rehabilitation, RH38 was successfully treated for numerous serious medical ailments including trauma, pneumonia, corneal damage and multiple organ infections due to sepsis. In April, the Center's staff and volunteers, along with partners from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), transported RH38 from Ke Kai Ola to North Hawai'i Community Hospital on Hawai'i Island for a CT scan, the first ever performed on a wild Hawaiian monk seal.

Though thought to be unrelated, the number of and complexity of her conditions highlights the seriousness of threats to this endangered species in the wild and the need for the ongoing, expert care The Marine Mammal Center and partners such as NOAA provide.

“For an endangered marine mammal like the Hawaiian monk seal, the release of every individual is critical to help boost the overall population,” says Dr. Shawn Johnson, Vice President of Veterinary Medicine and Science at The Marine Mammal Center. “RH38's recovery is an incredible success story that was full of medical complexities and highlights the importance of our ongoing partnerships to help save this species.”

Shortly following RH38's release, experts at The Marine Mammal Center took in a seriously ill weaned female pup from Kalaupapa, Moloka'i, after she was observed displaying open mouth breathing behavior and severe head swelling. Radiograph and ultrasound exams showed RL76 was suffering from head trauma, scratches and puncture wounds consistent with an interaction with another seal. The Center's veterinary experts are watching her closely as they consider next steps once her trauma and respiration improves. The female pup arrived last week with assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA's Inouye Regional Center.

“Both cases of RH38 and RL76 are excellent examples of the importance collaborative partnerships play in the conservation of Hawaiian monk seals,” says Jamie Thomton, the Kaua'i Marine Mammal Response Program Coordinator with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. “Conservation takes a village, and to see an outcome like this is a reaffirmation of the impact this critical work is having for this species' future.”

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. Through community engagement, education, stranding response and animal care, their dedicated staff and volunteers are working to save a species.

The Marine Mammal Center has rehabilitated and released 28 monk seals, including RH38 twice, 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 Kaua'i, report monk seal sightings to 808-651-7668 or call NOAA's statewide toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

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. Since 1975, the Center has been headquartered in the Marin Headlands, Sausalito, Calif., within the Golden Gate National Parks and has rescued and treated over 22,000 marine mammals.

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](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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