



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Endangered Hawaiian monk seal rescued from Kaua'i in critical condition at The Marine Mammal Center's hospital for monk seals on Hawai'i Island

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i – April 23, 2019) – A Hawaiian monk seal rescued on Kaua'i is currently in stable but critical condition at Ke Kai Ola, The Marine Mammal Center's hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal. The Center's veterinary experts have provided life-saving and supportive care, and continue to conduct extensive testing to find the cause of illness in the seal, a juvenile female known by researchers as RH38.

Initial tests by the Center's veterinary team found that RH38 is suffering from weakness, infection, broad-scale inflammation and malnutrition. Veterinarians are still trying to pinpoint the cause of these symptoms.

"We're incredibly concerned by RH38's case as every individual is critical to this endangered population," says Dr. Claire Simeone, The Marine Mammal Center's Hospital Director at Ke Kai Ola. "We are committed to finding the cause of her illness and are using world-class expertise and medical techniques to keep RH38 alive and get her back to the wild."

The Kaua'i Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Hui monitored RH38 over the past year and routinely observed her in good body condition. In March, she began to rapidly lose body condition. She was rescued from Kaua'i on March 12, 2019, and transported via U.S. Coast Guard flight to Ke Kai Ola.

During her initial critical care period, RH38 was tested for dozens of diseases, toxins and parasites. Veterinarians did not find any evidence of toxoplasmosis, leptospirosis, morbillivirus, or influenza, trauma, or poison, though they are not ruling anything out at this point.

Just recently, the Center's staff and volunteers, along with a team from NOAA, transported RH38 to North Hawai'i Community Hospital on Hawai'i Island for a CT scan. The Center's veterinary experts anesthetized her, and a scan was done on her entire body in order to more closely investigate the different organ systems that are showing signs of damage. This is the first CT scan ever performed on a wild Hawaiian monk seal. Veterinarians hope that the results will help pinpoint any underlying causes of her illness.

The opportunity to treat RH38 and investigate her illness allows scientists to learn even more about this endangered species and potentially understand how to better treat patients in the future. Any information gained from this case adds to the collective understanding about this critical species.

This is RH38's second time in rehabilitation at The Marine Mammal Center. She was originally admitted to Ke Kai Ola in August of 2017 for malnutrition and a heavy parasite load. She more than doubled in body weight during her three-month rehabilitation and was successfully released back to Kaua'i. Her current condition appears to be unrelated to her original admit.

Experts have no indication that this is a threat to the larger population of seals, but the marine mammal response team will continue to monitor the population in Kaua'i.

"No additional sick or malnourished monk seals have been detected across the main Hawaiian Islands," says Dr. Michelle Barbieri, a veterinarian with NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program. "We do not currently have any reason to believe that what is affecting RH38 is contagious to the rest of the population."

The Marine Mammal Center has over 44 years of experience in marine mammal health and medicine, and has discovered and diagnosed many novel conditions in marine mammals. The Center's veterinary team is bringing decades of knowledge and expertise to RH38's case, as well as consulting with a variety of wildlife health experts around the world.

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 outreach, education, response and animal care, our dedicated staff and volunteers are working to save a species.

The Marine Mammal Center has rehabilitated 27 monk seals since opening Ke Kai Ola in 2014, the majority of which were rescued from and returned to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. 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.

Volunteers are needed at the Kona hospital and visitor center in a variety of roles, including animal care, education and response. Interested individuals should visit [MarineMammalCenter.org/KKO-volunteer](https://www.marinemammalcenter.org/KKO-volunteer) to learn more about the opportunities available.

INTERVIEWS

Please contact Media@tmmc.org to arrange interviews.

ASSETS

Contact media@tmmc.org for images and video.

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. Our 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 20,000 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. Ke Kai Ola recently launched a new middle-school marine science program and participates in a number of education and community outreach programs on its own and with community partners.

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

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