



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Endangered Hawaiian monk seal released back to Northwestern Hawaiian Islands after rehabilitation by The Marine Mammal Center at Ke Kai Ola, a dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai'i Island

The pre-weaned female seal's release to Kapou (Lisianski Island) marks an important boost to the endangered species' long-term recovery

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAI'I – October 1, 2021) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world's largest marine mammal hospital, successfully released an endangered Hawaiian monk seal back to Kapou (Lisianski Island) after rehabilitation at Ke Kai Ola, the Center's hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal. As an essential business operating during the ongoing pandemic, the Center is committed to continuing its core mission work that includes conservation of threatened and endangered species.

“To return a young female pup back to the wild that had nearly zero chance of survival without intervention is an incredible success story,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian at The Marine Mammal Center. “As an endangered species, each monk seal matters, and this case highlights the importance of our ongoing partnerships to help treat and return them back to their ocean home.”

Hawaiian monk seal 'Eleu spent more than two months in rehabilitative care for malnutrition and maternal separation after being rescued in June from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. During her treatment, the pre-weaned pup greatly improved in overall body condition and stamina.

'Eleu experienced a remarkable weight gain of more than 90 pounds, nearly tripling in overall weight. Before her release, the seal was fitted with a temporary satellite tag that allows scientists to monitor her post-release. The satellite tag data will be combined with visual monitoring by researchers as possible.

“Rehabilitating a young pup in such a short period of time is no small feat,” says Dr. Michelle Barbieri, Lead Scientist for NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program. “We applaud The Marine Mammal Center for the expert care they provided 'Eleu, and are honored to support her return to Papahānaumokuākea as part of our Hawaiian monk seal research and recovery activities and our partnership with the Center.”

The successful release of 'Eleu was made possible thanks to the Center's partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

On Friday, September 10, the *Oscar Elton Sette*, a NOAA research vessel transporting scientists and supplies to conduct monk seal research and conservation efforts in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, shuttled 'Eleu from Kailua-Kona to Kapou. The animal was released from a beach pen a few days later.

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 36 monk seals, most of which have been rescued from and returned to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. as part of the partnership with NOAA, utilizing resources in the area to identify seals in need, rescue and rehabilitate them, and give them a second chance at life.

The Center's partnership with NOAA and other cooperating agencies is more important than ever to prevent this endangered species from becoming extinct. Approximately 30 percent of monk seals that are alive today are due to conservation efforts led by NOAA and partners like The Marine Mammal Center.

HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP

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 and Oahu, call NOAA's statewide toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

ABOUT THE MARINE MAMMAL CENTER

The Marine Mammal Center is a global leader in marine mammal health, science and conservation, and is the largest marine mammal hospital in the world. As a leading contributor to the global body of research and knowledge about marine mammal medicine and ocean health, the Center generates research findings and scientific outputs at volumes comparable to top academic institutions and prides itself on gathering and providing open research data that is free to access, reuse, repurpose and redistribute. The Center's teaching hospital and training programs operate globally with headquarters in Sausalito, CA. The Center has rescued more than 24,000 marine mammals from 600 miles of authorized rescue area along the California coastline and the Big Island of Hawai'i. The Center's mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education.

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