



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal Transported from O‘ahu to Hawaii Island for Life-Saving Care**

*Long-term outlook is unclear for the adult male monk seal as veterinary experts from The Marine Mammal Center start to address toxoplasmosis, as well as ingested fishing gear.*

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAII – October 18, 2021) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, has admitted an endangered Hawaiian monk seal suffering from toxoplasmosis, fishing gear ingestion, malnutrition and other ailments at the Center’s hospital in Kailua-Kona.

“This monk seal is a challenging case because we’re treating for toxoplasmosis, a complex and potentially deadly disease that requires daily management,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, The Marine Mammal Center’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian. “As the only partner organization permitted by NOAA Fisheries to treat and rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seals, we’re proud to be able to support patients like RW22, and we will do everything we can to give this endangered animal a second chance in the wild.”

Toxoplasmosis is one of the main threats and leading causes of death facing the endangered Hawaiian monk seal population in the main Hawaiian Islands.

Initial results from RW22’s blood work confirmed the animal has been exposed to toxoplasmosis, an extremely worrying result due to the historical poor long-term prognosis for this disease. Toxoplasmosis can cause brain infections and muscle tremors, the latter of which veterinarians observed in RW22. The Center’s team has started RW22 on a robust treatment plan to immediately tackle the disease and, in consultation with NOAA, has prioritized stabilizing the 13-year-old animal before considering surgery to remove multiple ingested single pronged hooks and other gear from his esophagus and stomach.

The Center’s veterinary experts are sedating RW22 daily for treatments and are tube feeding him to help boost his hydration and nutritional status. Despite the ingested fishing material, RW22 has been responding well to feedings. He is also being evaluated for a possible left eye injury.

### **HEAVY LIFTING FROM O‘AHU**

RW22 made the trip from O‘ahu to Kailua-Kona thanks to a combined effort from local responders.

On October 4, NOAA received a report of a seal with a fishing line in its mouth, via the NOAA marine wildlife hotline. NOAA’s trained experts worked with the Hawaii Marine Animal Response and community members to locate the seal, and were able to successfully rescue RW22 on October 6. The

team initially transported the seal to NOAA's Inouye Regional Center where an x-ray revealed the ingested fishing gear.

Due to RW22's deteriorated condition, NOAA determined additional care was necessary and initiated travel plans. The U.S. Coast Guard airlifted the seal that same day on a C-130 aircraft, as part of training operations.

"One of the Coast Guard's 11 statutory missions includes the protection of living marine resources," said Cmdr. James Morrow, the operations officer for Coast Guard Air Station Barbers Point. "It is always a pleasure to work side by side with our partner agencies like The Marine Mammal Center and NOAA to ensure the protection of endangered species like the Hawaiian monk seal."

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 Center's partnership with NOAA Fisheries, utilizing resources in the area to identify seals in need, rescue and rehabilitate them, and give them a second chance at life.

"This was a great team effort, and NOAA is very appreciative of the incredible rapid response by all involved," said David Schofield, NOAA Fisheries Regional Stranding Coordinator. "Everyone moved as quickly as possible to get RW22 into rehabilitative care for his best chance at survival."

The Center's partnership with NOAA Fisheries 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 Fisheries and partners like The Marine Mammal Center.

## **HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP**

With no vaccine available for toxoplasmosis, preventative measures must be taken by the general public. This disease is spread into the environment exclusively via cat feces. To help protect endangered Hawaiian monk seals like RW22 from toxoplasmosis, simply dispose of cat litter in the trash, keep your cats safe indoors and tell your community about how they too can prevent this disease from harming more marine mammals.

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.

Report hooked, stranded, or entangled monk seals to the NOAA Fisheries statewide toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840. NOAA Fisheries also recommends these [best practices](#) to reduce injuries to monk seals when fishing.

## **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.

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