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Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal Air-Lifted from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument to Specialized Hospital

The malnourished young seal was transported by a U.S. Coast Guard C-130 to Ke Kai Ola, The Marine Mammal Center's dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai'i Island.

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAII – June 23, 2021) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world's largest marine mammal hospital, admitted an endangered Hawaiian monk seal from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument at its hospital in Kailua-Kona. The successful rescue and transport of PP08, a prematurely weaned female pup, 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).

“Separated from her mom too soon, this young pup had nearly zero chance of survival without intervention,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian at The Marine Mammal Center. “Each individual matters, especially for an endangered species, and we are grateful to our partners for their support in achieving our mission, and ensuring this young pup has a second chance at life.”

Since late May, biologists from USFWS have been monitoring PP08 on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial. Born in mid April, PP08 weaned from her mother too early, and was observed underweight, a major risk for a female seal in an endangered population. Based on USFWS's observational reports, NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program decided a rescue and transport of PP08 to The Marine Mammal Center's hospital in Kona was necessary for rehabilitative care until she can be released back to the wild at a healthy weight.

“PP08 was measured at just 78 cm girth, and what we've seen is that pups who wean at less than 90 cm girth have essentially no chance of surviving to the next year,” says Dr. Michelle Barbieri, Lead Scientist for NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program. “Thanks to the combined efforts that went into detecting, rescuing, and transporting PP08 to definitive care at The Marine Mammal Center's hospital, especially before she became too depleted or sick, she has a very good chance at being fully rehabilitated and released back in Papahānaumokuākea, where she'll have a second chance at growing to adulthood.”

NOAA coordinated logistical and operational support for this rescue in partnership with USCG, USFWS and the Center. On Tuesday, June 15, a U.S. Coast Guard C-130 aircraft, transported Dr. Whoriskey and her team to Midway Atoll to accompany PP08 on her return flight to Kona.

“One of the Coast Guard’s mission sets includes the protection of living marine resources,” said LT Sam Potter, pilot at Air Station Barbers Point involved in the rescue. “It is a very fulfilling mission and we are proud to assist our partner agencies in recovery efforts of these endangered animals.”

During her initial critical care period, Center experts noted that PP08 was moderately malnourished but is alert and active. The Center’s veterinary team took a series of blood samples and a fecal sample for further analysis during the animal’s admission exam.

“PP08 has been feisty and extremely vocal since her arrival, which is a really positive sign for a young pup,” says Dr. Whoriskey. “She is currently being tube fed a mix of electrolytes and sustainably ground herring to help boost her weight. Our team plans to introduce her to whole herring and offers of live fish in the coming days to help further spur her appetite and get the vital nutrients she needs.”

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 35 monk seals, most of which have been rescued from and returned to Papahānaumokuākea as part of their partnership with NOAA, utilizing resources in the Monument 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

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.

Report all monk seal sightings, injuries, and strandings to NOAA’s statewide toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

About The Marine Mammal Center

Headquartered on the site of a former Cold War missile base, 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. The Center’s teaching hospital and training programs operate globally, with its headquarters in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, part of the National Park Service. Expert teams from the Center travel around the world to work with emerging first responders and has itself rescued more than 24,000 marine mammals from 600 miles of its authorized rescue area of 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. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).