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Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal Transported from O‘ahu to The Marine Mammal Center for Life-Saving Care

Veterinary experts perform complex procedure to remove ingested fishing gear from juvenile male monk seal at the Center’s Hawai‘i Island based hospital

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAI‘I – January 31, 2022) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, has admitted an endangered Hawaiian monk seal suffering from fishing gear ingestion and moderate malnutrition at the Center’s hospital in Kailua-Kona. The juvenile male monk seal, known by researchers as N2, is currently in stable condition.

“The ingested fishing gear clearly impacted this monk seal’s condition and we’re hopeful thanks to a successful procedure, that this animal is on the road to a full recovery,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, the Center’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian. “We’re proud to be able to support patients like N2 as the only partner organization permitted by NOAA Fisheries to treat and rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seals. We will do everything we can to give this endangered animal a second chance to return to his ocean home.”

Hawaiian monk seals suffer from very high rates of entanglement in ocean trash and fishing gear, as well as ingestion of fishing hooks.

During the seal’s initial critical care period, Center experts stabilized the animal before performing a successful procedure to remove an ingested hook from his stomach. During the procedure, the team also took a series of blood samples and a fecal sample for further analysis.

The Center’s veterinary team noted that N2 was moderately malnourished but is alert and quiet. The plan is to slowly begin offering sustainably caught live and dead fish feedings as well as subcutaneous fluids to help boost his nutritional status and hydration in the coming days.

A COMPLEX RESCUE ON O‘AHU

N2 made the trip from O‘ahu to the Center’s hospital thanks to a combined effort from local responders.

On January 22, NOAA received a report via the NOAA marine wildlife hotline of a seal on the Ka Iwi Coastline with a wire fishing leader and a swivel hanging from its mouth. NOAA Fisheries staff responded to evaluate the seal’s condition, but it was not possible to attempt to remove the gear at the time due to logistical constraints. Hawaii Marine Animal Response (HMAR) then deployed 13 people, for 54 hours, spanning 5 days to look for and ultimately find the seal at Hanauma Bay on January 27. Trained

experts from NOAA and HMAR performed a successful rescue that day, and the response team transported the seal to NOAA's Inouye Regional Center.

Due to the seal's condition and need for long term rehabilitation after the endoscopy procedure, NOAA initiated travel plans to bring the seal to The Marine Mammal Center's hospital on Hawai'i Island. The U.S. Coast Guard airlifted the seal on January 28 via a C-130 aircraft, as part of training operations.

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.

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

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.

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