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Hooked Hawaiian monk seal from O‘ahu gets green light for release after receiving life-saving care at dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai‘i Island

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAI‘I – February 3, 2022) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, approved the release of an endangered Hawaiian monk seal back to O‘ahu after treating the animal for fishing gear ingestion at Ke Kai Ola, the Center’s hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal. The successful rescue, treatment and release of R7AF, formally known as N2, was made possible thanks to the Center’s partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Coast Guard, Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), and Hawaii Marine Animal Response (HMAR).

“To quickly return this hooked juvenile seal back to his ocean home is an incredible success story and a testament to the importance of our ongoing partnerships to help save this species,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, the 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 help give R7AF a second chance at life especially when the survival of each individual is critical to the recovery of the population.”

After the animal’s arrival and endoscopy procedure at the Center’s hospital on January 28, veterinary experts noted the animal was recovering well. The Center’s team utilized special dehooking tools while R7AF was under anesthesia to safely remove the ingested hook avoiding a more complex surgery and recovery. Analysis from a series of blood and fecal samples taken during the initial care process showed no signs of illness, including toxoplasmosis. Based on the seal’s health status and heightened risk for habituation due to its age, the Center recommended its immediate release, and NOAA initiated release plans.

For information on N2’s return to O‘ahu, visit [NOAA Fisheries Hawaiian Monk Seal Updates](#).

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 37 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.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ON HAWAI‘I and MAUI

The Marine Mammal Center is recruiting new volunteers for our operations on Hawai‘i Island and Maui. Recruitment opens on February 7 and will remain open through March 18. Learn more about volunteering and sign up to attend upcoming virtual trainings on The Marine Mammal Center’s [website](#).

“Our Hawaiian monk seal conservation volunteers play an integral role in helping us save this endangered species by monitoring and identifying seals that may require rescue and rehabilitation,” says Lauren Van Heukelem, the Center’s response and operations coordinator. “Volunteers also provide valuable public outreach to help raise awareness about the risks of human and pet interactions, and why this native animal is critical to the health of our shared ocean home.”

The Center values volunteer engagement and inclusivity, and is proud to welcome existing and new volunteers into its *ohana* to create an even more robust and diverse community of volunteers.

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. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).