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Three endangered Hawaiian monk seals admitted to Ke Kai Ola, a dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai'i Island

The admission of three new seals, two pups from Laysan Island and a hooked seal from Moloka'i, comes on the heels of the population surpassing 1,500 individuals thanks to continued conservation efforts

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i – June 15, 2022) – Just a few weeks after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) [announced](#) that the Hawaiian monk seal population has grown to more than 1,500 individuals for the first time in more than 20 years, The Marine Mammal Center has admitted three seals to Ke Kai Ola, the Center's hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal. The successful rescues, made in partnership with NOAA and other agencies, demonstrates the urgent need to maintain regulatory protections and fund continued conservation efforts to help save the species.

“Treating three young seals that were unlikely to survive the coming months without intervention, including one due to fishing gear interaction, are critical examples of why our work matters,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian at The Marine Mammal Center, who helped oversee their rescue and initial care. “As the only partner organization permitted by NOAA to treat and rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seals, we're proud that nearly 30 percent of monk seals that are alive today are due to conservation efforts led by NOAA and partners like The Marine Mammal Center.”

Last month, scientists aboard the NOAA Research Vessel *Oscar Elton Sette* performed physical exams and initial treatment on the two seals from Laysan Island (Kamole). NOAA scientists rescued these two pups while deploying seasonal field camps to conduct monk seal research in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The research ship shuttled the pups to Kona, and from there they were quickly transported to Ke Kai Ola for treatment on May 24.

“As soon as we found the two pups at Kamole, we knew they needed help to survive,” said Dr. Michelle Barbieri, Lead Scientist for NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program. “We monitored them around-the-clock while they were in transport on the ship. We look forward to providing transport on their return to Papahānaumokuākea too, so that they can hopefully produce pups of their own someday.”

The two seals, WQ22, a female pup, and WQ08, a male pup, both weaned early at a small size and were unlikely to survive the winter season due to their poor body condition.

Both are following a strict treatment regime, including oral multivitamins and electrolytes added to their daily tube feedings to help boost hydration. WQ22 is already eating well on her own, and WQ08 is taking positive steps toward eating offers of sustainably caught fish. The Center's veterinary team also took a series of blood samples to check for signs of disease including toxoplasmosis.

QUICK ACTION TO RESCUE HOOKED SEAL ON MOLOKA‘I

Shortly after WQ22’s and WQ08’s arrival to Ke Kai Ola, the Center admitted a third seal, a hooked patient, RP92, thanks to a rescue effort led by the National Park Service on Moloka‘i. The Park Service first alerted NOAA and The Marine Mammal Center of a seal in distress on June 2 and noted the presence of fishing gear hanging from its mouth, an indication of likely gear ingestion. After the successful rescue, NOAA provided basic triage care and coordinated next-day transport to Kona for comprehensive assessment and treatment at Ke Kai Ola.

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

The Center’s veterinary team notes that RP92 is slightly underweight but is already eating well post-procedure, a hopeful sign for the animal’s recovery.

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.

HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP

The public should keep a safe distance of [at least 50 feet](#) from monk seals and report sightings to the Center’s response team via 24-hour hotline: on Hawai‘i Island at 808-987-0765 and on Maui at 808-292-2372.

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

INTERVIEWS

Please contact Media@tmmc.org to arrange interviews.

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 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](#).

