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Hook Free and Headed Home: Hawaiian monk seal RP92 released back to his ocean home on Moloka‘i after receiving life-saving care at dedicated hospital for monk seals on Hawai‘i Island

(KAILUA-KONA, HAWAI‘I – July 13, 2022) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, approved the release of an endangered Hawaiian monk seal back to Moloka‘i, where he was initially rescued. The Center’s veterinary experts treated the seal for fishing gear ingestion at Ke Kai Ola, the Center’s hospital in Kailua-Kona that is dedicated to the endangered marine mammal. The successful rescue, treatment and release of RP92 was made possible thanks to the Center’s partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the National Park Service.

“Our team is thrilled to release RP92 back to the wild after he made a full recovery from a complex procedure to remove a swallowed fishing hook, an incredible success story,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, the Center’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian. “This seal’s story reemphasizes the importance of our ongoing partnerships to help save this species when the survival of each individual is critical to the recovery of the population.”

The Center’s team utilized special dehooking tools while RP92 was under anesthesia to safely remove the ingested hook near the animal’s larynx, 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. After the endoscopy procedure, veterinary experts noted the animal was recovering well.

After gaining more than 25 pounds during his more than five weeks in rehabilitation, the Center recommended his release, and NOAA initiated release plans.

A SPECIAL LIFT TO MOLOKA‘I

Thanks to NOAA’s coordination with partners, on Friday morning, July 8, a team from The Marine Mammal Center met USCG crewmembers at Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport to safely transfer RP92. A Center staff member accompanied the seal aboard a USCG helicopter during the flight to designated National Park Service land on Moloka‘i. RP92 was successfully released back to the wild the same day. Before release, the animal was fitted with a temporary satellite tag that will allow scientists to monitor his movements in the wild.

“The life of each monk seal is critically important, especially since there are just over 1,500 left in the world,” said Diana Kramer, NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Division, Pacific Islands Region.

“We’re thankful to have such great partners to care for seals like RP92. We’re also excited to learn more about RP92’s life and movements through the satellite tag. There is so much these animals can teach us.

“We hope to use the information gained from RP92’s tag to track his success, and also for broader population recovery efforts,” Kramer added.

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 38 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 of [at least 50 feet](#) from monk seals and at least 150 feet from monk seal mothers with pups. 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.

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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