



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **CONTACT**

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### **The Marine Mammal Center suspects Hawaiian monk seal RM28 died from injuries due to severe shark bite trauma after rescue in Kauaʻi**

(Kailua-Kona, Hawaiʻi – January 25, 2023) – The Marine Mammal Center and The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are deeply saddened to announce that a juvenile female Hawaiian monk seal known as RM28 passed away at Ke Kai Ola, the Center’s hospital in Kailua-Kona dedicated to the conservation of this endangered species, after suffering severe shark bite trauma.

“Our team is deeply saddened to report the loss of RM28, especially knowing that this 3-year-old seal could have played an important role to further boost the population of this endangered species,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, the Center’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Veterinarian. “We’re heartened to know that this seal received the best possible care, and her story reemphasizes the importance of our ongoing partnerships to help save the Hawaiian monk seal.”

During the seal’s initial critical care period, Center experts stabilized the animal and began treating RM28 for extensive and severe wounds consistent with shark bite trauma. During the admission exam, the Center confirmed NOAA’s initial assessment and diagnosed the patient with severe shark bite trauma. The Center’s experts noted the animal was in poor body condition, administered antibiotics and pain medication, and also took a series of blood samples and swabs for further analysis. Despite the team’s best efforts, RM28 died in treatment on January 16.

A necropsy, or animal autopsy, was performed the next day to determine the cause of death. After a thorough necropsy exam, Center experts suspect that RM28 likely died directly from the severe trauma or due to complications associated with the trauma. The Center’s team is awaiting bloodwork diagnostics to determine whether the seal also had any underlying health complications. No other immediate findings of significance aside from the trauma and poor state of condition were found during the necropsy exam.

### **A MONK SEAL IN DISTRESS**

After displaying lethargic behavior, RM28 was rescued in a shallow cove off the Kauaʻi coast on January 11 by NOAA’s trained experts with assistance from the Hawaiʻi Department of Land and Natural Resources’ (DLNR) Division of Aquatic Resources. NOAA received reports of RM28 appearing to be in poor condition the previous day. The animal was immediately brought to a DLNR facility on Kauaʻi for initial assessment and triage care. NOAA experts diagnosed the seal with severe wounds consistent with shark bite trauma and noted the animal was in poor condition.

RM28 was airlifted and transferred into the Center’s care at Ke Kai Ola via the U.S. Coast Guard for further rehabilitation on January 12. This action was taken after NOAA experts determined the animal needed long-term rehabilitative care and had stabilized enough for transport.

"Thanks to the numerous reports from concerned residents about this seal's injuries, we were able to respond quickly and determine that RM28 needed veterinary care. She was a well-known seal on the beaches of Kaua'i, and we are saddened by this loss." said Jamie Thomson, NOAA Fisheries' Kaua'i Response Coordinator.

Although shark attacks are not uncommon, negative human interaction, fisheries interaction via hooking and entanglements, and diseases like toxoplasmosis are the main threats the endangered Hawaiian monk seal population faces on the main Hawaiian Islands.

As the only partner organization permitted by NOAA to treat and rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seals, The Marine Mammal Center is proud that nearly 30 percent of monk seals that are alive today are due to conservation efforts led by NOAA and partners like the Center.

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.

## **HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP**

The public should keep a safe distance of [at least 50 feet](#) from Hawaiian monk seals and report all sightings to the statewide NOAA Marine Wildlife Hotline at 1-888-256-9840. On Hawai'i Island and Maui, sightings can also be reported to the Center's response team via 24-hour hotline: 808-987-0765 (Hawai'i Island) and 808-292-2372 (Maui).

[Click here](#) to find more information on how you can help Hawaiian monk seals.

## **INTERVIEWS**

Please contact [Media@tmcc.org](mailto:Media@tmcc.org) or [stefanie.gutierrez@noaa.gov](mailto:stefanie.gutierrez@noaa.gov) to arrange interviews.

## **ASSETS**

Please reach out to Stefanie Gutierrez at NOAA Fisheries Pacific Island Regional Office for photo assets: [stefanie.gutierrez@noaa.gov](mailto:stefanie.gutierrez@noaa.gov).

## **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](http://MarineMammalCenter.org). Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).