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Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal released back to O‘ahu after receiving life-saving care at The Marine Mammal Center

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i – February 2, 2023) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, is happy to announce the release of a juvenile endangered Hawaiian monk seal back to O‘ahu.

The Center had been treating Malama, formally known as RQ76, for malnutrition at Ke Kai Ola, the Center’s Hawaiian monk seal hospital and visitor center in Kailua-Kona. The successful rescue, treatment, and release of Malama was made possible thanks to the Center’s partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

“For an endangered species like the Hawaiian monk seal, every patient matters. That’s especially so for a young female seal like Malama when it comes to the future recovery of the population,” 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 monk seals, we are grateful to our partners for ensuring this young pup has a second chance to return to her ocean home.”

After gaining more than 50 pounds during her nearly five months in rehabilitation, the Center recommended her release, and NOAA initiated release plans. Before release, Malama was fitted with a temporary satellite tag that will allow scientists to monitor her movements in the wild.

“It’s really special when we return a rehabilitated seal to the wild,” said Diana Kramer, NOAA Fisheries’ Pacific Islands Regional Stranding Coordinator. “The first thing we saw RQ76 do was put her feeding skills to work, snacking on a sea cucumber! We’re hopeful that she will flourish and contribute to the monk seal population. And we’re thankful to the many people and partners who made RQ76’s future possible.”

Malama was born on June 6, 2022, on Mānana Island, a state seabird sanctuary off the island of O‘ahu. NOAA Fisheries along with partners and local community members were actively monitoring Malama because she was undersized when she weaned from her mother about a month after her birth. On August 4, 2022, thanks to good weather and well-coordinated plans, NOAA scientists successfully rescued the female pup. After two days of triage care at NOAA’s Daniel K. Inouye Regional Center in Honolulu, Malama was shuttled to Kona aboard the NOAA Research Vessel *Oscar Elton Sette* for treatment at Ke Kai Ola.

Known by researchers as RQ76, the pup was given the name Malama, meaning light, month or moon, by students at Malama Honua Charter School. The name symbolizes being a light and hope for the community.

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.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ON HAWAI'I and MAUI

The Marine Mammal Center is recruiting new volunteers for operations on Hawai'i Island and Maui. Recruitment ends on February 13. Learn more about volunteering and sign up to attend upcoming virtual trainings on The Marine Mammal Center's [website](#).

Hawaiian monk seal conservation volunteers play an integral role in helping save this endangered species by monitoring and identifying seals that may require rescue and rehabilitation. 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, or family, to create an even more robust and diverse community of volunteers.

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.

A document with suggested captions and appropriate credit info is included.

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](#).