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Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal Back Home on Kaua‘i After Receiving Life-Saving Care For Ingested Fishing Gear at The Marine Mammal Center

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i – April 9, 2024) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, is happy to announce the successful release of endangered Hawaiian monk seal RS10 back to Kaua‘i. The 8-month-old male monk seal made a speedy recovery after being brought to the Center due to ingested fishing gear which was promptly removed. The successful rescue, rehabilitation, and release of RS10 was made possible thanks to support from the community and the Center’s partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

“Fishing gear ingestion can pose life threatening health risks to Hawaiian monk seals making this important intervention necessary for RS10’s survival,” says Dr. Sophie Whoriskey, Associate Director of Hawai‘i Conservation Medicine at The Marine Mammal Center. “For an endangered species like the Hawaiian monk seal, every patient matters. We are grateful to the community for their support and our partners for their rapid response ensuring this seal can now return to his ocean home.”

During the seal’s initial critical care period that included an admission exam, the Center’s veterinary team noted that RS10 was alert, eating offers of fish well, and actively exploring his rehabilitation pen.

The Center’s veterinary team took a series of radiographs (X-rays) confirming the presence of a fishing hook lodged in the animal’s esophagus.

On March 25, the Center’s team utilized special dehooking tools while RS10 was under anesthesia to safely remove the ingested hook midway down the animal’s esophagus, avoiding a more complex surgery and recovery. Experts also submitted a series of blood samples for diagnostic testing to assess his overall health. After the endoscopy procedure, veterinary experts noted the animal recovered well and received anti-inflammatory drugs to aid in the post recovery process.

During the seal’s two plus week rehabilitation period, animal care experts provided RS10 a hearty and calorie-rich diet of sustainably caught herring to help boost his nutritional status.

HEAVY LIFTING TO AND FROM KAUA‘I

RS10 made the initial trip from Kaua‘i to Kailua-Kona thanks to a combined effort from local responders.

On March 16, 2024, NOAA received a report of a seal with a fishing line in its mouth. NOAA's trained experts worked with the DLNR and community volunteers to locate the seal, and after tracking for several days, were able to successfully rescue RS10 on March 21.

The U.S. Coast Guard then airlifted the seal the following day on a C-130 aircraft, as part of training operations. USCG members later airlifted RS10 on April 4 for the animal's return journey to Kaua'i.

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 45 monk seals. Most of these seals have been rescued from and returned to Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as part of the Center's partnership with NOAA Fisheries. Together, the Center works with NOAA to identify seals in need, rescue and rehabilitate them, and give them a second chance at life.

"We're very thankful for the Kaua'i volunteers and community members who were monitoring RS10 and alerted us to the potential ingested hook," said Frankie Koethe, Hawaiian monk seal recovery coordinator, NOAA Fisheries. "RS10 now has the chance for a long and healthy life in the wild where he can contribute to the growth of the Hawaiian monk seal population."

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 150 feet from mom-pup pairs.

Report hooked, stranded or entangled monk seals to the statewide NOAA Marine Wildlife Hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

NOAA Fisheries also recommends these [best practices](#) to reduce injuries to monk seals when fishing.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ON MAUI

The Marine Mammal Center is recruiting new volunteers for operations on Maui. 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.

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](#).