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Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal R8HA Receiving Life-Saving Care at The Marine Mammal Center After Rescue and Transport from Kaua‘i

(Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i – July 16, 2024) – The Marine Mammal Center, the world’s largest marine mammal hospital, has admitted an endangered Hawaiian monk seal at the Center’s hospital in Kailua-Kona, Ke Kai Ola. The juvenile male monk seal, R8HA, is currently in serious but stable condition. The successful rescue of R8HA from Kaua‘i was made possible thanks to support from the community and the Center’s partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

“Although not out of the woods from a health standpoint, thanks to the important and timely response from DNLR and NOAA, we will do everything we can to give R8HA a second chance to return to his ocean home,” says Megan McGinnis, Associate Director of Hawai‘i Community Conservation at The Marine Mammal Center. “Conservation takes a village. We are proud that nearly 30 percent of monk seals that are alive today are due to efforts led by NOAA and partners like the Center and DLNR.”

During the seal’s initial critical care period, which included an admission exam, the Center’s veterinary team noted that R8HA was very emaciated and lethargic. Experts collected blood samples and swabs for diagnostic testing. Early results showed the seal was hypoglycemic and had an electrolyte imbalance. Test results ruled out toxoplasmosis, but the team is waiting on results for other diseases.

Animal care experts are offering R8HA a hearty and calorie-rich diet of sustainably caught herring, and in recent days, his appetite has improved.

A CRITICAL INTERVENTION TO A SEAL IN NEED

NOAA and DLNR had been closely monitoring R8HA over a two-month period due to the seal’s thin body condition. However, when R8HA suddenly declined rapidly, the agencies decided that urgent response, medical assessment, and further treatment were in his best interest. Together with volunteers, they conducted a successful response on June 24 and brought R8HA to a DLNR facility on Kaua‘i, pending inter-island transport.

During initial triage care at the holding facility, R8HA suffered a hypoglycemic crash and required round the clock care from veterinary experts to keep the animal alive. The NOAA team also performed additional diagnostics for R8HA including full body radiographs (X-rays). Thankfully, the animal stabilized and was deemed fit enough for a USCG transport to Ke Kai Ola on July 27.

“Considering the urgency of R8HA’s condition, the U.S. Coast Guard rapidly evaluated aircraft resources and ensured an HC130J Super Hercules aircraft was available to safely transport the patient from Kaua‘i to Kona,” said Maile Norman, U.S. Coast Guard District Fourteen’s living marine resource specialist. “The Coast Guard is a proud partner in protecting the Hawaiian monk seal population and the quick collaborative efforts highlight the importance of teamwork in protecting these endangered species.”

Since 2014, the Center has rehabilitated and released 45 monk seals, most of which have been rescued from and returned to the 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.

The Center’s partnership with NOAA Fisheries and other cooperating agencies is more important than ever to prevent this endangered species from becoming extinct.

“The rescue of this young seal was possible due to the passionate dedication of numerous partners, volunteers, and community members,” said Jamie Thomton, NOAA Fisheries’ Kaua‘i Marine Wildlife Response Coordinator. “It’s great news that his appetite has been increasing, and we’re hopeful that R8HA will continue to improve thanks to the specialized care he’s receiving.”

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

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, Hawai‘i, and Maui. The Center’s mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education.

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