Pacific Islands Region
Marine Mammal Response Network Activity Update

May – August 2009

#12

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Inside This Issue

Monk Seals 1-3
Cetaceans 4-6
Network News 6
Images From the Field 7

Monk Seals

W34/35

On June 14, 2009 responders received a report that a young seal had fishing line coming out of its mouth in Kapaau, on the Big Island of Hawaii. W34/35, a two-year-old female Hawaiian monk seal was found on June 20, 2009 with a hook in its mouth and transported to the Kona Airport. The seal was placed aboard a SCG C-130 for a flight to Oahu to have the hook removed. The seal was stabilized in the new "Monk Seal Urgent Care Facility" at the Waikiki Aquarium. On June 23, 2009 the animal was transferred to the Marine Mammal Care Laboratory at Marine Corps Base Hawaii where NOAA Fisheries Service contract veterinarians, Drs. Bob Braun and Gregg Levine, oversaw the procedure to remove the hook.

Dr. Braun removed the hook using a customized device that was developed by a local engineer from Waimanalo, Vinnie De Paulo. De Palo created two tools for extracting large circle hooks. Each tool is designed to manipulate different parts of the hook, one for the eye of the hook and the second to manipulate the bend/curve of the hook. The instruments were very effective in removing the hook from a very difficult position on the seal with little trauma.

(above) X-ray of W34/35 with hook in the throat. In this image the seal's skull is to the left and the neck vertebrae are to the right.

Hawaiian Monk Seals

Dr. Gregg Levine took samples from the animal to better understand its overall health and for population level studies. The animal was fitted with a satellite tag and after three days of recuperation at the Waikiki Aquarium the seal was transported back to the Big Island by the USCG and released near the spot where it was rescued. Tracking data showed the seal behaving normally in the days, weeks, and months following the release.

(top right) W34/35 in the urgent care facility at the Waikiki Aquarium.

(above left) Team releases W34/35 on the Big Island near the spot where the animal was rescued.

(above) Mom and pup on north shore of Kauai. This is one of five pups born on Kauai in 2009.

Seal Births 2009

As of early October 2009 a total of 13 pups have been born in the main islands (Kauai: four, Oahu: two, Molokai: six, Maui: one). The first pup of the year was born on Kauai in March to seal RH58. RH58 was born on Kauai in 2000 and this is her 3rd pup. She spends most of her time on Oahu, but returned to Kauai to give birth. Two of the 13 pups died relatively soon after they were born. RH44 gave birth in a remote area in Hana, Maui. Her pup was found dead several days after birth. RK30 lost her newborn pup to high surf. She pupped along a small beach on the Napali

Coast and her pup was swept out to sea and never seen again. Two of the moms, RQ21 and RY30, have pupped for seven consecutive years. Both seals were born on Kalaupapa, Molokai and have given birth there each year. R015 has given birth on the Big Island of Hawaii every year since 2003, but it is unsure whether she will pup again this year. At the time of this writing there are still two nursing pups on Molokai (R006 and R016).

Mom ID	Island	Pup ID
RH58	Kauai	RA00
RK30	Kauai	Died
Temp365	Kauai	RA16
R5AY	Kauai	RA20
RS00	Oahu	RA12
R020	Oahu	RA14
RQ21	Molokai	RA02
RY30	Molokai	RA08
TempMM3	Molokai	RA06
R017	Molokai	RA10
R006	Molokai	Still Nursing
R016	Molokai	Still Nursing
RH44	Maui	Died

Dehookings

A two-year-old male seal was seen for parts of July, most of August, and into September with a fish hook in its mouth. Intervention was not possible because the seal had hauled up on rocks and lava where responders could not safely access the seal. Fortunately, the hooking appeared superficial and non-life threatening. After over a month of waiting for the seal to get to a safe place, the animal was discovered without the hook in its mouth.

Another monk seal was also seen with fishing line coming out of its mouth and days later was seen without the hook.

Both seals are currently doing well.

(above) Weanling pup plays with a plastic bottle.

Oiled Seal

A monk seal weanling plays with a plastic bottle that was improperly disposed of.

This seal also had remnants of crude oil on its fur. Oil can be toxic to marine mammals but not at the small amount noted on this seal.

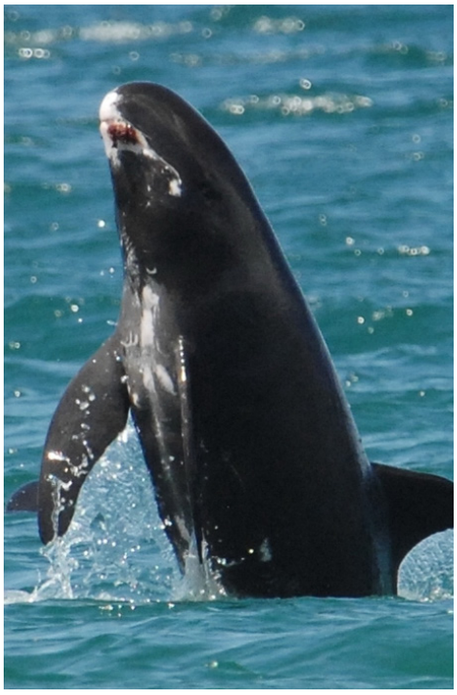
Cetaceans

May 2009 Pygmy Killer Whale Stranding Event on Maui

A small pod of pygmy killer whales (*Feresa attenuate*) was observed between May 1-21, 2009 in the near shore waters of Maalaea Bay, Maui. These deep water dolphins were monitored daily by NOAA Fisheries Service responders and volunteers. In the beginning, there appeared to be four to six animals but over the following three weeks, the number of animals dwindled to just a single individual observed on May 21, 2009. After taking dozens of photos of the pygmy killer whales during the first couple weeks, only one animal showed obvious signs of a potential physical problem. It had the stalk barnacle known as *Xenobalunus* protruding from its mouth. However, this is a fairly normal occurrence in deep water toothed whales, especially if the barnacle gets the opportunity to attach to a hard surface, such as an exposed tooth.

On May 22, 2009 a single adult pygmy killer whale was found alive and beached on a small sandy cove in Maalaea Bay. Bystanders, meaning well, pushed the dolphin back into the water before the response team arrived. The dolphin drifted over to Maalaea Harbor and got stuck between the surf and the break wall. David Mattila (NOAA Sanctuary), Nicole Davis (NOAA Fisheries Service), and lifeguards with their jet ski were able to guide the animal safely into the boat harbor where it was held in a stretcher in shallow water. The veterinarian arrived on scene and was able to assess the animal and prepare it for transportation to a waiting holding pool at the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (HIHWNMS).

An auditory test determined that it did not



(above) A pod of approximately six Pygmy Killer Whales were observed milling offshore for three weeks before a single male finally stranded near shore of Maalaea Bay on May 22, 2009.

have any signs of acoustic trauma. However, it was determined that the best course of action for the animal was to humanely euthanize it because diagnostic testing revealed a very sick animal. Hawaiian cultural practitioners took time to acknowledge the animal and people involved in the response before it was euthanized.

A necropsy and CT scan conducted on Oahu the next day confirmed the veterinarian's diagnosis. This was a mature male that was emaciated, missing several teeth, had a low white blood cell count and suffered from pneumonia and liver damage. He had no use of his right lung and only partial use of his left lung.

(above) Pygmy Killer Whale chest x-ray: Yellow arrow demonstrates consolidation caused by pneumonia. Left lung was non-functioning and right lung was greatly compromised.

(top left) The stranded Pygmy Killer Whale was assessed on scene and transported to the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary saltwater holding pool for further diagnostics tests.

Hooked bottlenose dolphin has vegetation and barnacle growth which could hinder vision/health.

The bottlenose dolphin "PIRO2009A" has frequented an aquaculture pen array off Kona, Hawaii for the last several years. The dolphin feeds on fish that are attracted to the fish farm and has been known to eat escapees of the species located within the pens. Earlier this year the animal was observed to have a fish hook in the right corner of its mouth. At the time of discovery, marine mammal experts and veterinarians determined that this was a non-life threatening situation. However, in the late spring it was reported that

(above) A known dolphin, "PIRO2009A", was observed with a fish hook in the right corner of its mouth earlier this year. Although this injury is not an immediately life threatening, the growth on the hook may eventually inhibit this animals ability to forage.

there was fouling growth on the hook that might have begun to adhere to the animal's dermis with the potential to obstruct vision. Pictured to the right is a close up of the stalk barnacle known as *Xenobalunus* that is pictured above as a bouquet of barnacles and vegetative growth. On August 15-20, 2009 NOAA Fisheries Service response team members attempted to capture the animal to remove the hook, however, they were unsuccessful. The animal currently appears to be under-weight but is foraging. Another attempt at capture, utilizing a larger capture net attached to one of the fish pens, will be used this fall.

(above) Single *Xenobalanus* stalk barnacle from the hook in the 2009PIROA's mouth. This represents one of a multitude of the same species which has colonized the hook.

Dwarf Sperm Whale Stranding on Kauai

On the morning of September 24, 2009 Lloyd Miyashiro responded to the report of a stranded whale at the mouth of the Kilauea River in Kauai. He found a small whale with a pink belly and grey back resting on the sand bank. Kim Rogers and Marilou Knight photographed and measured the animal while equipment and medications needed for the response were collected. During this time the animal was washed into the deeper waters of the bay by the tide. The whale swam out in the waves near the surfers, followed by what looked like a cloud of blood. The Ocean Safety officers assisted with calling surfers onto shore, for fear that sharks could be attracted to the area. The whale was identified as a dwarf or pygmy sperm whale (Kogia). It was observed letting off a cloud of dark red black liquid in its distressed state, also known as "inking". Kogia feed on squid and are able to retain the ink in their intestine. They can release the ink when frightened to hide from predators.

Eventually the whale was moved back onto shore by the waves and responders were able to safely approach the whale to take its vital signs and inject it with a heavy sedative. Upon examination the dwarf sperm whale was observed to be very bruised and abraded from the rocks and waves. It was decided to humanely euthanize the whale, as it had restranded several times. The Ocean Safety officers and several young men on the beach provided much needed assistance to retrieve the whale so it could be studied to better understand the overall health of the animal.

(above) Dwarf Sperm Whale found in Kilauea Bay, Kauai on August 27, 2009.

Network News

New non-profit is in place on Oahu to support NOAA's mission of monk seal recovery

The Hawaiian Monk Seal Response Team Oahu (HMSRTO) received their 501©3 federal non-profit status in June 2009. HMSRTO's mission is to protect and perpetuate the endangered Hawaiian monk seal species through media relations, special school programs, and public event outreach booths. They are striving to raise awareness of the Hawaiian monk seal. HMSRTO also maintains and trains volunteers to assist in responding to Hawaiian monk seal haul-outs, pupping events, injuries, and anything else they can do to assist in the recovery of the Hawaiian monk seal. The non-profit status allows the 100% volunteer organization to search for and accept tax deductible donations to assist federal and state agencies in the recovery of the Hawaiian monk seal. They have an online store where visitors can make online donations as well as purchase merchandise that will help generate some of the needed income for the program. Visit www.hmsrto.org for more information.

Images From the Field

(above three) KP2 interacting with surfers, swimmers, paddlers, and other ocean users. For the safety of the public as well as Hawaiian monk seals any form of interaction with these wild animals is discouraged.

(below) In July a small group of Orcas was sighted off of Niihau. In the recent past there were strandings of single Orcas on Kauai in 2008 and on Lanai in 2004.

What Can You Do to Help?

To report a stranded or injured dolphin or whale, please call the NOAA Marine Mammal Emergency Hotline at 1-888-256-9840.

Stranded dolphins and whales are generally sick or injured and require medical attention. **Do not approach, handle or push the animal back into the sea.** Coming to shore may be a way for the sick or injured animal to prevent drowning and also avoid predators. By calling the NOAA Hotline immediately, you will receive guidance on the best way to help the stranded animal.