

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

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NOAA

Monk Seals

The Story of KP2 Continues

KP2 is a Hawaiian monk seal who took up residency in Molokai and was embraced by the community. His story spread throughout the Hawaiian Islands, and even made the Wall Street Journal and CBS Evening News. KP2 began to frequent Kaunakakai Pier and quickly became friendly with people. As he matured his playfulness turned to rough-housing, as is normal behavior for any wild seal. It is important to remember that interacting with seals, as with other wild animals, has the potential to be harmful to humans. It is often the case where a seal will attempt to play or interact with humans in the same way it would with other seals. KP2 had become too accustomed to humans and was starting to pose a threat to swimmers at the pier as well as himself.



KP2 is his temporary holding pool at the Waikiki Aquarium

On October 16th, 2009 KP2 was collected by NOAA Fisheries from the Kaunakakai Pier and transported to Oahu. He was held at the Waikiki Aquarium and monitored by veterinarians and volunteers of the Hawaiian Monk Seal Response Team Oahu (HMSRTO). A medical examination of KP2 found that he had cataracts in both eyes. After consideration, KP2 was deemed non-releasable into the wild. It was determined that the best course of action would be for him to remain in captivity under the short term care of experts at University of California in Santa Cruz (UCSC), Long Marine Laboratory. At UCSC, he would be under the supervision of several experienced marine mammal scientists and veterinarians from around the United States. Community members and cultural practitioners from Oahu and Molokai came together to send KP2 off with a Hawaiian blessing.

At UCSC KP2 is healthy and gaining weight. He eats many different types of fish, exhibits a playful attitude and curiosity towards objects introduced to him. He is learning many different types of behaviors which are necessary in providing him with the best possible care. Leading marine mammal veterinarians and specialists continue to closely monitor KP2's eye condition and are currently deciding whether surgery would be beneficial to him. KP2 will also participate in scientific research which will help determine his health condition as well as provide valuable information that will be used towards the conservation of Hawaiian monk seals in the wild.



Hawaiian Monk Seals

When he finishes his treatment and the research program at UCSC, it is hoped KP2 will return to Hawaii where he will make his home in a long-term public display facility. Although facilities in Hawaii are not presently equipped to provide the type of care that KP2 needs, plans are underway to develop a long term home for him. KP2 will serve as an ambassador as he continues to educate the public about the conservation of this critically endangered species.

Updates on KP2 at UCSC can be found at: www.monkseal.ucsc.edu

6th Semi-Annual Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Count, October 17th, 2009

October 17th, 2009 marked the 6th semi-annual Hawaiian monk seal count. This event completes three full years of monk seal counts. With now over 300 dedicated volunteers, the seal count is a golden opportunity for volunteers from every main Hawaiian island to raise public awareness through outreach and media visibility. The seal count is an excellent outreach tool and provides scientists with a “snap-shot” in time of the MHI monk seal population. Past counts have led to the discovery of previously un-identified as well as injured seals. The count has provided scientists with an additional monitoring tool to track the health of the MHI population.

The amount of time that a seal spends on shore greatly depends on factors such as season, size, sex, and food availability. NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) has documented and identified 110-115 seals in the MHI. The numbers of seals sighted during the past six counts do not represent the total number of seals in the main Hawaiian island population. Scientists have estimated that about one third to one half of these seals are hauled out at any given time.

2009 Pup Update

Twenty one pups were born in the MHI in 2009. The first pup of the year was born on Kauai to seal RH58. RH58 is 9 years old and gave birth to her third pup in March. Two of the thirteen 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 where her pup was swept out to sea and was never seen again. RQ21 and RY30 are two mothers who have pupped for seven consecutive years on Kalaupapa, Molokai where they were born. Seven seal pups were observed on Niihau from boat and aerial surveys.

Mom ID	Island	Pup ID	Sex
RH58	Kauai	RA00	Female
RK30	Kauai	Died	
Temp365	Kauai	RA16	Male
R5AY	Kauai	RA20	Female
RS00	Oahu	RA12	Male
R020	Oahu	RA14	Female
RQ21	Molokai	RA02	Male
RY30	Molokai	RA08	Male
TempMM3	Molokai	RA06	Female
R017	Molokai	RA10	Female
R006	Molokai	RA32 (F) or RA34 (M)	
R016	Molokai	RA32 (F) or RA34 (M)	
RH44	Maui	Died	
R015	Maui	RA36	Male

Table 1: Summary of main Hawaiian island monk seal births in 2009. Note that it is uncertain as to which of the two of tagged Molokai pups belong to moms R006 and R016.

	28 April 2007	20 October 2007	19 April 2008	18 October 2008	20 April 2009	17 October 2009
Kauai	13	6	13	14	16	14
Oahu	6	5	14	9	7	9
Molokai	19	7	8	15	11	9
Maui/Lanai	1	3	0	5	0	4
Kahoolawe	2	1	2	0	1	2
Big Island	0	1	1	5	0	1
Total	41	23	38	48	35	39

Table 2: Summary of the data collected during the semi-annual MHI monk seal counts between April 2007 and October 2009



Maui community embraces newborn seal in Hana

A male monk seal pup was born at Koki Beach in Hana, East Maui on October 9th, 2009. The mother is a well known animal from the Big Island who had given birth there for the last seven years. The event was monitored by NOAA, Department of Land and Resources (DLNR) staff, volunteers and Hana residents.

The mother and pup pair remained at Koki Beach for a month then swam down the coast to a private, ancient Hawaiian fishpond. The pup had quite an eventful time during his first few weeks. While swimming in the shallow water, he briefly became entangled with a plastic ring around his neck – likely the top part of a Ziploc bag. The entanglement was not immediately life threatening but could be a hazard as the pup continued to grow. Luckily the plastic ring slipped off the pup's head and he was freed of disentanglement.

About a week after becoming entangled, the pup followed his mom above the high tide mark and across the road. The Maui Police Department rerouted traffic as the seal pair remained on the road for two nights. Road blocks were set-up as volunteers and staff remained on site all night. Once the seals returned to the water, volunteers blocked the road access with large pieces of wood and debris as well as aluminum fencing. This has proved to be successful as mom and pup never hauled back out on the road.

R015 weaned her pup after seven weeks of nursing. R015 had been observed in the area but only making contact with her pup a few times. The pup received his flipper tags (RA26) four weeks post-weaning, and was still utilizing the fishpond.

Pupping events are not common on Maui. The last successful documented birth to occur on Maui was in 2003.

To give the mom and pup pair adequate protection new volunteers from the Hana region were recruited and trained, by NOAA Maui Marine Mammal Response Coordinator, Nicole Davis. In addition, extremely dedicated volunteers from all sides of the island braved the long and very windy drive to Hana in order to help fill shifts. The role of the volunteers was to conduct outreach with tourists and residents about monk seal biology and conservation.

To support the volunteers during this pupping event individuals from University of Hawaii and DLNR spent time working in Hana. Having an official presence in the area was a big help to some of the volunteers who had devoted hundreds of hours to filling gaps in the schedule. The staff also conducted outreach to spread the monk seal conservation message through signs, meetings and school visits.



R015 and her pup on the beach

The residents of Hana have a strong sense of respect for their community as well as for the natural resources of their island. This carried over with regard to the monk seals. Many members of the community frequently checked in on the pup and shared stories of his growth through town. Most showed their respect by keeping their distance from the seals. As a result of this pupping event, solid roots of monk seal awareness have been established in the east side of Maui and many thanks go out to all of the individuals who helped monitor the pup.



Maui Police Department rerouted traffic as the R015 and her pup hauled in the middle of the road

Cetaceans

RA50 from Nihoa

On December 12th, 2009 NOAA Fisheries was surprised to find a weaned seal from Nihoa (RA50) at Sharks Cove, Oahu.

This would indicate that RA50 travelled a minimum distance of approximately 260 miles. RA50 was part of the PIFSC's relocation study in which scientists moved six young seals from French Frigate Shoals to Nihoa Island in September. RA50 and several of his fellow Nihoa residents were captured, health screened and instrumented with satellite tags to compare residents' behaviors with our translocated seals. RA50's satellite tag stopped

transmitting on November 6, (about 4 months earlier than projected). NOAA Fisheries was concerned for his safety but was relieved when he was spotted on Oahu with his satellite tag still attached. It appeared to have been entangled in some form of debris and perhaps this may be the reason it had stopped transmitting a signal. Shortly after the initial sighting, RA50's tag fell off and was recovered. Valuable data from the tag was downloaded by PIFSC scientists enabling them to learn about the movements of this animal.



Satellite data show that RA50 swam at least 260 miles from Nihoa to Oahu

Cetaceans

December 2009 Near Mass Stranding Event, Maui

A near mass stranding event of approximately 5-10 dolphins occurred in the late afternoon of December 10th, 2009 at Sugar Beach on Maui. Well-meaning bystanders pushed the individual dolphins that came ashore back out into the water to join a pod of approximately 20 dolphins that were milling close to shore. The bystanders did not notify NOAA or the stranding team until most of the animals had already moved off. When the stranding response team arrived on scene, the dolphins were already moving offshore. The team stayed past dark and was out again at dawn the next morning to look for the dolphins.

Over the next few days volunteers monitored Sugar Beach and all of Maalaea Bay. Two to three dolphins were briefly observed several hundred feet off shore but they were not seen again for the rest of that day. A larger group of dolphins were also observed about a half mile offshore. The next day, a dolphin stranded at Kamaole

Beach Park II, in South Kihei. The animal was pushed back out to sea before NOAA or the stranding response team was notified. Shortly thereafter, a large tiger shark was observed following two dolphins as they traveled back and forth between a small area of the coastline. Volunteers and staff from federal and state agencies maintained shore observations until the last sighting of the dolphins and shark at midday.

The following morning, NOAA Fisheries received a report of two dolphins offshore in North Kihei near Sugar Beach. NOAA Fisheries arrived on scene to find three dolphins diving, splashing, thrashing and fast swimming near a large school fish rippling at the surface. One animal was frequently observed farther from the other two animals. All three dolphins appeared to be moving with the large school of fish – milling, traveling a short distance and changing direction often. By mid morning all three dolphins had disappeared and

there were no further sighting reports for the day.

Unfortunately, species identifications could not be confirmed for any of these events and it is uncertain whether the animals observed throughout the three days were the same.

Intensive education and outreach efforts during these events were made to inform people to call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline first to allow for a proper and efficient response by the Stranding Response Team.

Special thanks to the Stranding Response Team and all the volunteers that kept their eyes glued to the ocean and prepped response gear and equipment; special thanks also go to the Federal, State and County staff for their assistance.



November, 2009 Hooked Spinner Dolphin, La Perouse, Maui

On November 25th, 2009 a spinner dolphin was reported hooked in La Perouse Bay, South Maui. The dolphin was described as having a hook embedded in its right lower jaw, going through the tongue, and essentially pinning the dolphin's mouth open. There was also a small metal leader and ball attached to the hook but no trailing line. The right side of the dolphin's face reportedly also showed a few wounds/scrapes and/or cuts – though none were bleeding or appeared very fresh. Unfortunately, available photos only showed the left side of the head but it was apparent that the lower jaw was out of line.

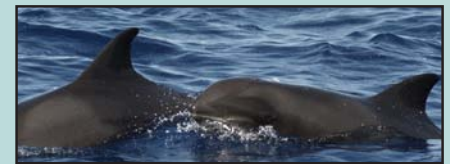
This spinner dolphin is part of a larger pod of dolphins that frequently rest in La Perouse Bay. The animal was first reported by a group of people that regularly swim in La Perouse Bay hoping to be in the water with the dolphins. The next morning, swimmers were back out at La Perouse Bay and encountered the same hooked dolphin. They took pictures and observed that the dolphin was able to open and close its mouth although the end of its mouth could not close completely. The dolphin could swim, breathe and dive but appeared to be “hanging back from the rest of the pod”. This dolphin did not strand and it

remained with the pod as they moved off in the afternoon. The hooked dolphin was reportedly seen a couple times over the following week but no reports have been made since. It is unknown whether the dolphin survived.



This dolphin in La Perouse Bay was described as having a hook embedded in its right lower jaw, going through the tongue, and essentially pinning the dolphin's mouth open

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.

Images From the Field



(left) This is RI37 observed on Molokai. She's the daughter of R5AY and was born on Kauai in 2005. Lately she's been frequenting Oahu



(left) It appears that someone tried to put a cigarette out on a monk seal. The burn mark is close to the seal's right flipper.

(right) NOAA recommends that people avoid swimming, snorkeling or interacting too closely with monk seals. Hawaiian monk seals are not normally known to be aggressive towards humans, but in certain circumstances will defend themselves if threatened. Monk seals are also protected from harm and harassment under both the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. If you witness activities of concern around monk seals please call 1-800-853-1964.



Special thanks to: United States Coast Guard, Department of Conservation and Resource Enforcement on Molokai, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources, Hawaiian Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, community of Hana, Maui, and all state wide NOAA Fisheries Service marine mammal response volunteers.

All photos in this edition are authorized through NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program Permit # 932-1905