



December 2007

Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network Activity Update

“Dedicated to humane marine mammal response in the Hawaiian Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands”

This is the 2007 4th quarter issue of the Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Activities Report. As always a special mahalo to all agency partners and volunteers for their tireless efforts. Questions, comments, or requests for information can be sent to

David.Schofield @noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries

Pacific Islands Regional Office

1601 Kapiolani Blvd.

Suite 1110

Honolulu, Hawaii 96814

www.fpir.noaa.gov

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NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office • October - December 2007

2nd Semi-annual Hawaiian Monk Seal Count : October 2007 Total 23

Island coordinators provided brief excerpts from reports on the seal count results. The number of monk seals stands at **23**, which is down from our **41** in April. This indicates that the effort by volunteers and the monk seals that show up will be variable each time, especially since this is a “snapshot approach” twice a year. The Big Island report shows that the known monk seals were observed the day before was well as the day after the count, however, not on the day of the count. There is a strong likelihood of this occurring on the other main Hawaiian Islands. Many will recall that several weeks before the 1st count in April, there were 6 seals in the Keiki Pool at Poipu, Kauai, none of which were seen on the day of the count. Additionally, we did

not have the effort that we were afforded last April on Molokai, which accounted for 5 moms and 5 pups on Kalaupapa.

An aerial survey was performed on the north shore of Molokai, around the entire island of Lanai, and the south coast of Maui, by volunteer pilot David Meek and observer Dera Look (an experienced cetacean aerial surveyor). Unfortunately, no monk seals were sighted, and the photos are still being analyzed.

Similar to the first count, there were some coordination “bumps in the road” and lessons learned. We are very grateful for all of the volunteer effort and patience as we continue to improve this event. Despite

small issues, most would agree that this was another successful undertaking. New partnerships were formed, and the network capacity was enhanced as most of the neighbor islands had an increase in the volunteer participation.



This monk seal was hiding amongst tree limbs and almost missed on Molokai.

Results From the Count

Big Island (1): (Melissa Netze, UH Hilo Marine Mammal Response Program Coordinator)

- One monk seal was counted. I05/I06 (the male offspring of R015 and O42’s sibling) was sighted Friday, Oct. 19th at Lighthouse Beach.
- I05/I06 Sunday Oct. 21st at Upolu point (approximately 3–4miles from

Lighthouse).

- Adult seal was sighted Wednesday October 17th, at Mahukona.
- R042 was transmitting via her satellite tag. She was on the Big Island but was not seen by participants on October 20th. She was sighted in the afternoon on Sunday Oct. 21st at

Kahakahakea Beach (3 miles southeast of Pohue Bay).

- B11, the new Waimanu pup, was sighted on the Big Island during the count. This pup weaned Sept. 27, 2006, and still resides at the beach of his birth as a resting place. Including B11, the total number of seals most often on the Island of Hawaii is four.

Results continued

Maui and Lanai (3): (Nicole Davis, Maui Marine Mammal Response Program Coordinator)

There were 3 confirmed seal sightings on Maui; 0 on Lanai. The sightings were made by Marv and Michelle Paularena at Hookipa, and Eddie Fuentes and Heather Peach near Big Beach (2 seals were together).

Kahoolawe (1): (Cheryl King, Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission) One seal was observed at Seal Beach.

Molokai (7): (Julie Sigler) Within Kalaupapa colony, observed 3 seals near Iliopii point. O39 was observed near the end of her molt, and B17 and B21 were in the same general area. While scuba diving off Mokuhooniki on the eastern shore of Molokai, Jim Rhinehart observed 1 seal hauled out on rocks. Ken Bare observed 2 seals that were approximately 150 feet apart and located

about 1 mile west of Kolo Wharf. Kathy Coelho observed 1 seal sleeping on shore east of Fagan's Bay, and a second seal was observed briefly outside of a fishing area known as Ulua House near Halawa Point, as the seal popped its head out of the water. Unable to record its identification numbers, a box was seen on the seal's back. According to Dr. Charles Littnan, this is a sub-adult female with a "track pack" that was instrumented recently on Kalaupapa.

Oahu (5): In Zone 1 (Kaena Point), Jen Kishimori, Erika Wasner, and Cynthia Rajani recorded 1 adult monk seal. From Zone 3 (Waialua), Bob and Wanda Wright documented 1 adult monk seal.

In Zone 12 (Waimanlo to Hawaii Kai), D.B. Dunlap observed 2 adult monk seals. Finally, in Zone 13 (Diamond Head), Ann Egleston counted 1 adult monk seal (Irma).

Kauai (6): (Jennifer Todice, Kauai Monk Seal Conservation Hui) In Zone 1 (Salt Ponds, Burns Field, Glass Beach), Donna Lee and Stan Johnson observed 1 large adult in the water while he was attempting to haul out. In Zone 4 (Sheraton Hotel to Brennekees), Bruce Parsil and Stan Johnson observed 2 large males hauled out at Poipu Beach. From Zone 5 (Hyatt Hotel, Maha'ulepu, Hauala), Millie Johnston, Cindy and Jesse Adams, and Lionel and Mary Medieros recorded 2 monk seals, a mom and pup pair, at Mahaulepu Beach. Finally, in Zone 16 (Larsen's Beach to Pilaa), Brenda Zion and Julie Wallace documented 1 adult male.

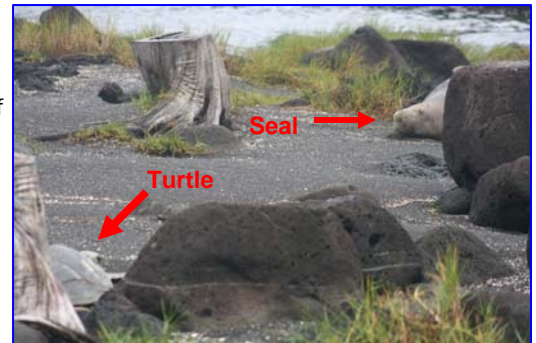
MAHALO to all who participated! The next count will be April 19th, 2008. Please pencil it in your calendars for the new year!

Can Hawaiian Monk Seals Get Turtle Tumors?

Dr. Thierry Work, DVM (Wildlife Disease Specialist, USGS National Wildlife Health Center) & George Balazs (Marine Turtle Biologist, NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center)

On your excursions to various Hawaii beaches looking for monk seals, many of you may happen to occasionally encounter green sea turtles (*honu*) with unsightly tumors. These tumors are most often on the eyes and flippers, and in the mouth, but they can also occur in internal organs. The current state of knowledge regarding this disease, called fibropapillomatosis (FP), is that it is associated with a reptilian herpes virus. FP has been documented in green turtles in Hawaii since the 1950s. The disease also occurs worldwide at various levels of prevalence in the six other species of sea turtles. In Hawaii since the early 1980's, numerous turtles that died from FP have been necropsied by scientists and their research partners at the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC). There have also been many instances during that time where tumored turtles, especially in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, have been in close or direct contact with monk seals. To date, there is absolutely no credible evidence that these tumors (nor the virus associated with them) are transmissible from turtles to warm blooded animals, including monk seals or even humans.

Happily, the intensity of FP in Hawaiian green turtles appears to be on the decline. Nevertheless, tumored turtles not uncommonly still show up on shore. If you see a stranded sea turtle, dead or alive, be sure to report it to the PIFSC **Marine Turtle Stranding Research phone number at 808-983-5730**. For additional information, including the reporting of stranded turtles throughout Hawaii, please see <http://www.turtles.org/nmfs/>. You can make a difference in our understanding of sea turtle biology and disease by reporting sick or dead turtles. You can also make a difference in the survival of live stranded turtles that are amenable for treatment and rehabilitation. Since 1990 the PIFSC and its partners have treated, rehabilitated, and returned to the ocean 474 marine turtles.



Recently at Richardson's Beach near Hilo on the Big Island a tumored turtle stranded near a hauled out monk seal causing concern. The known female "015" however was in no danger as described above. The turtle was humanely euthanized because of the severity of its condition.

Last Known Location and End of Satellite Tag Data for R042

Since December 11, 2007, R042 had been observed in Milolii on the Big Island of Hawaii. She resided predominantly in a fish pond that is privately owned by the family of Lenrick “Alika” Grace known as Omokaa Bay Beach (see responder profile below). Justin Viezbicke and David Schofield visited Lenrick, and observed R042 resting. The seal appeared in good body condition and appeared to be at the very beginning stages of her molt. At right are images of the fish pond and coastal area currently frequented by R042, and R042’s satellite tag that had fallen off on the same day that David and Justin visited the area.



Left: R042 resting. Center: R042’s satellite tag. Right: Justin and Lenrick posting more signs.



Left: Pictures of R042 resting at Omokaa Bay Beach and likely starting to molt.

A Tragic Loss for MHI Hawaiian Monk Seal Population: An Important Female Dies

Nicole Davis Hawaii Pacific University (HPU)/ NOAA PIRO Maui Marine Mammal Response (MMMRP) Coordinator

On October 2nd, 2007 a Hawaiian monk seal was found washed ashore dead on the East side of Lanai. The next day, Nicole Davis arrived via Expeditions Ferry from Maui, David Schofield and Darin Padula flew over from Oahu, and Dr. Bob Braun arrived from Kauai to conduct the necropsy. Special thanks go to DOCARE Officer Coelho for his quick response and invaluable assistance. The carcass was several days old but in decent body condition on the outside with no obvious signs of trauma. However, the internal tissues and organs were quite decomposed leaving very little to sample for analysis. The cause of death remains undetermined.

The monk seal was identified as R011, a known adult female that resided in Maui County. She was documented up and down the west coast of Maui for over five years, and many residents and volunteers recognized and observed her on a

regular basis. R011 was not tagged, but her distinct cookie cutter shark scars and other markings made her easy to identify. She was also known to take advantage of the more isolated beaches on Lanai’s coastline. In the spring of this year, she had her fourth documented pup on the island of Molokai. R011 had the potential for many more reproductive years, and her death is an enormous loss for the monk seal population. She will be missed.



Good News! The 13th Main Hawaiian Islands' Pup of the Year Born on Mahaulepu, Kauai, is Thriving—Dr. Mimi Olry, Kauai Monk Seal Conservation Hui (NOAA/DLNR)

This year's Hawaiian monk seal pupping season ended with a surprise for Kauai Island Coordinator, Dr. Mimi Olry, and committed volunteers with a 4th female pup born on October 10th. While everyone was busy managing molting seals at the ever-popular Poipu Beach Park, K12 made a surprise visit after months of absence. She didn't appear to be pregnant, it was the end of the pup season, and she had already weaned four pups in four consecutive years. However, just a week before pupping, K12 visited all her previous pupping sites on Kauai's south shore. She hauled out at Kiahuna Point and the remote Kipu Kai, and she finally pupped on Mahaulepu Beach. Over the years, female monk seals return to the same beach to pup, often their own natal beach. It is unknown whether expectant seals consider the time of year, ocean conditions and other factors. Although in 2004, K12 had pupped at Mahaulepu on a long stretch called "Gillin's Beach", this year she pupped further to the east on a windy point called Kamala or "Beach Hut".



In April, volunteers Bruce Parsil and Larry Rauchut prepared for a pupping event at a high profile beach by training many volunteers and organizing a schedule. The first three pups were born at remote sites, thereby not requiring a significant amount of volunteer protection or public outreach. As autumn approached, we assisted the PIFSC biologists locate seals to tag them with tracking devices, and prepared for the molting males. The timing of this late birth did not have many of the volunteers that had signed-up for the summer and the available volunteers were unable to drive along the rough dirt roads to Mahaulepu Beach.

Fortunately, some volunteers and new

recruits rallied to take three-hour shifts to monitor mom and pup over the next five weeks. Mahaulepu is one of Kauai's most stunning beaches, being very "wild" and often windy. The weather, unrestrained dogs, and more visitors challenged everyone. Over the weeks, we befriended kite surfers that were initially oppositional, by helping them launch their kites. We provided ropes for unleashed dogs. To protect the monk seal pup from interactions with dogs, DLNR enforcement officers responded regularly to cite repeat leash law offenders, and volunteers helped enlarge the fenced enclosure as mom and pup traveled along the beach. Other seals often hauled out to rest and interact with the mom and pup pair.



True to K12's weaning behavior, she left her plump pup during the night. All the next morning the pup vocalized and searched for mom. K12 suddenly reappeared mid-day. It was a reunion of vocalizing and playful rolling in the surf. The following morning, the very thin K12 was gone again, but this time the pup snoozed peacefully. In the days following, we observed the pup hauling out to sleep peacefully with her front flipper draped over her "security stick".

A plan was made to tag and relocate the pup to a more remote site, where she would not need intensive monitoring to protect her from unleashed dogs as well as from unintentional conditioning to swim with people. Unfortunately, no suitable location could be found on the south shore where she would be safe from the high winter surf and flooding polluted streams. Keeping her at Mahaulepu proved most ideal, and volunteers continued pup-sitting into the eighth week. Tagged "B24", she now swims for long periods and hauls out all along the half-mile stretch of Mahaulepu beach.



In the middle of December, B24 returned to Mahaulepu where she was roped off in her seal protection zone. Along with the

Kauai Island Coordinator, volunteers alternated duties to conduct "spot checks" on B24 and the other seals during the busy holiday season.

Once again, NOAA and DLNR extend a big *mahalo nui loa*, to all of the devoted volunteers who gave so much time, valuable suggestions, resources, effort, and kindness in this pup event. In addition, appreciation is extended to NOAA PIRO Island Coordinators Melissa Netze (Big Island/UH Hilo) and Nicole Davis (Maui) for travelling to Kauai to relieve Mimi on the weekends.

As the Hawaiian monk seals have only begun to re-inhabit and reproduce on the main Hawaiian Islands, we face very exciting and challenging times to participate individually and collectively in saving this species, one of Hawaii's oldest native treasures. Everyone's contribution is valuable, even and especially for one little seal, like B24, who will hopefully grow up and produce pups of her own.



Cetacean Strandings / Entanglements / Collisions

Risso's Dolphin Stranding on Maui—Nicole Davis (MMMRP Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries PIRO, HPU)

On December 27, 2007, an adult Risso's dolphin, approximately 8 feet in length, stranded alive at Sugar Beach, Kihei. Just before 7 a.m., beach walkers saw a dolphin stranded nearly on the shore. They pushed the dolphin back over the reef ledge and out into the ocean. The dolphin quickly returned to shore, and again, they pushed it out one more time, resulting in an immediate re-strand. By 7:40 a.m., they began holding the dolphin in waist-deep water while the report was called in to various agencies, including the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (HIHWNMS), the Maui Police Department, and Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE).

Nicole Davis received a call at 8:10 a.m. from Hannah Bernard, Hawaii Wildlife Fund (HWF), who was notified by DOCARE supervisor, Dexter Tom. MPD was on scene, and both David Schofield and Dr. Kristi West were

informed. One MPD officer, E. Vuong, was on scene with approximately 15 people gathered on shore. Four people were in waist-to-chest-deep water holding the animal in place. Ed Lyman (HIHWNMS) and Nicole confirmed the species and initial status of the animal. The dolphin was held in the same place in the ocean by two to four people at a time. Preparations were made for transportation to a new location and a veterinarian response.

The dolphin was held in shallow water for approximately four hours. The dolphin's body was listing to the left, and there was some evidence of reef rash in addition to several fresh, small wounds that were possibly cookie cutter shark bites. There was "lice" in and around fresh wounds, and the dolphin was fairly lethargic with its eyes closed. When a shark was spotted, the dolphin's eyes opened and it became very active. The dolphin suddenly became very agitated as the shark appeared to swim toward it. When the shark was spotted in the water close to the dolphin and handlers, the dolphin was released for three reasons: 1) the dolphin began thrashing and moving wildly with the potential to cause harm to the handlers; 2) the chance of a shark attack increased dramatically; and 3) the distance was too great and there was not enough time to safely bring the dolphin to shore before the shark potentially reached them. The handlers released the dolphin and safely came to shore. When the dolphin was released, it was already pulling away from the handlers and as it swam off, it was still listing to the left.



Underwater photo of the Risso's dolphin by Ed Lyman (HIHWNMS).

The dolphin was visible for only a few minutes as it slowly circled out to sea, and then all visual contact was lost. The area was observed for several hours, but the animal did not re-strand nor was seen again. Nicole requested for assistance from Archie Kalepa, Maui Lifeguard Chief, to dispatch a Kihei lifeguard on a jetski to search the near shore waters for the dolphin. Kekai, a South Maui Lifeguard, arrived on jetski and coastline. Nicole also helped search for a mile in either direction of the last sighting. A kayaker paddled by the near shore area and did not see any signs of the dolphin. Most of the crowd on the beach dispersed by this time. The active search for the dolphin was called off; Nicole and Joe continued to scan the area. By 1:30 p.m., David Schofield, Dr. Kristi West and Dr. Gregg Levine arrived to conduct a debriefing with Nicole and Joe.



Volunteers carefully held the Risso's dolphin in shallow waters.

Spinner Dolphin Death - Dr. Kristi West & Whitney White (HPU)



The HPU stranding response team received a call the morning of September 30th, 2007, with a report of a "drowned" spinner dolphin off the coast of Waianae, Oahu. Two of our

stranding response members immediately headed to Waianae to meet with the group of individuals that witnessed the drowning of the spinner near the Waianae boat harbor. The animal was observed with "abnormal behaviors" at the surface of the water before sinking to approximately 7 ft underwater, swimming forward a few feet and finally sinking to the bottom. Four boat operators dove down to the bottom of the bay, wrapped a rope around the spinner and pulled it up onto the deck of the boat and brought it to the nearby harbor. Our stranding response team members transferred the spinner into the back of a truck and a necropsy was conducted that day.

Tissue samples were collected and sent off for histopathology, disease screening and genetic analysis. The pathology report indicated that this animal likely died from septicemia, a widespread bacterial infection transported by the bloodstream.



Strandings in the South Pacific - Lui Bell (South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme)



Left: A 4.8 m short-finned pilot whale stranded on November 21, 2007, at a beach on Emau Island, Central Vanuatu. No obvious cause of death. A skin sample was obtained and sent for genetic analysis (Submitted by Francis Hickey). **Center:** Unidentified floating dead whale off Fiji in November 2007. **Right:** An unidentified "hunk of whale" that came ashore on December 17, 2007, on the Marshall Islands. Courtesy of the U.S. Military. Tissue samples are being sent off for toxicology and genetic analysis.



Responder Profiles Lenrick "Alika" Grace

Lenrick "Alika" Grace is a 9th generation Hawaiian resident, and his family has owned the 296-acre *ahupuaa* that fronts the protected bay in the Milolii region of the Big Island of Hawaii. Currently, this seems to be an ideal location for the monk seal R042, especially since access is limited and Alika, who is also a community leader, USCG Auxiliary Crewman, and fire fighter, has been keeping a watchful eye over R042. While there have been reports of feedings and interactions, he has single-handedly educated the local community and the public that visits.

Kauai Monk Seal Conservation Hui

The following is a list of volunteers who watched over the mom and pup or helped out in some other way. This team worked on Kauai from sunrise to sunset for about five weeks until the pup was weaned. A very special *mahalo* goes out to the dedicated group listed below!

- Wendy McIlroy
- Donna Lee
- Kyle Brown
- Tara Leota
- Margaret Clark
- Cindy, Bill and Jesse Adams
- Sheri Knapp and Edd Schepker
- Larry Rauchut
- Lynn Nowatski
- David Kuhn
- Anne O'Malley
- Ivory McClintok
- LeDonna Fair
- Thomas Wheeler
- Denise Jones
- Millie Johnston
- Dale Fetz
- Patty and Melissa Anthony
- Monique Imberski
- Myra Van Ornum
- Marilouou Knight
- Cindy and Cathy Granholm
- Susan Ferrell
- Angella Correale
- Paul Sansoucy
- Mary Neudorffer and Lionel Medeiros
- David Leopold
- Scott and Deb Robinson
- Lynn Pizzullo
- Sandy Carlson
- Lorraine Osterer
- Michial Freigang
- Kim Rogers
- Fran and Kyle McDonald
- Barry and Mary Werthwine
- Jerry Gottsdanker
- Phil and Katie Zeidner
- Royden Kabazawa
- Kai Kahiau
- Bill Snyder

Network News – The Marine Mammal Response Network is Growing

Meet Nicole and Melissa

Nicole Davis is the Maui Marine Mammal Response Program (MMMRP) Coordinator for HPU under NOAA Fisheries PIRO. She grew up in Monterey, CA, and graduated from University of California Santa Cruz. She has a degree in marine biology and has worked in the field on Maui for the last eight years. As the MMMRP Coordinator, Nicole responds to Hawaiian monk seals and stranded cetaceans, as well as manages volunteers and public outreach efforts.



Melissa Netze was born in Groton, CT, and spent her teen years living in Florida. After graduating from high school, she spent the next few years traveling. Her travels took her from the U.S. Virgin Islands to the Colorado Rockies, eventually landing in Hilo, Hawaii, pursuing a degree in marine science at the University of Hawaii, Hilo. Since with UH Hilo, she was given the opportunity to oversee a seven-week study, which entailed monitoring the birth and nursing behaviors of a Hawaiian monk seal. The project involved: coordinating and training volunteers; collecting extensive data to be used in future nursing behavioral analysis; and protecting the mother and pup seal by patrolling the area and educating the local community. The experience has led to her current role as the primary responder of the Hilo-based chapter of the Marine Mammal Response Network.

Images From the Field



Why did the chicken cross the...monk seal?

Poipu Beach: Kauai Monk Seal Response Volunteer
Bruce Parsil



There is something fishy about this stranding...?

The Maui stranding response team responded to a call about a whale in a cane field that turned up to be a 10 ft + marlin!



Gastrointestinal parasites in monk seals

At the bottom of this monk seal's body (*left*), are gastrointestinal worms passing from this male monk seal. The predominant parasites in monk seals are tapeworms (*Diphyllobothrium* spp.) and nematodes (*Contracaecum* spp.). The overall effects of these parasites on the seals are mostly unknown, although ulceration of the stomach associated with infection has been observed. Even though they haven't been identified as a cause of death, they can add stress, particularly to juveniles or seals that already have a poor body condition. In this picture, this guy's got a pretty heavy parasite load but is in good body condition. (Shawn Farry, PIFSC)



Variation on the “Entanglement Theme” in Florida Waters

An eight-year old male dolphin “wearing” (entangled in) a Speedo bathing suit. The dolphin was disentangled by a rescue team from the Sarasota Dolphin Research Program in Sarasota Bay, Florida. Luckily, the “bathing suit” was not seen obstructing the blowhole but the animal sustained deep lacerations at the base of both flippers. The young male was immediately released and has since appeared to be doing well, hopefully learning from the experience.

Photos and account: courtesy Dr. Randy Wells.



3rd Semi-annual Hawaiian Monk Seal Count



Saturday April 19, 2008 ♦ 10 a.m.—1 p.m.

Mahalo to all who participated in the previous Semi-annual Hawaiian Monk Seal Counts. In 2007, 41 (April) and 26 (October) monk seals were counted across the main Hawaiian Islands.

Help make the 3rd Hawaiian Monk Seal Count a success!

- ♦ NOAA is looking for interested groups or individuals to participate.
- ♦ The goal is to have volunteers & community members counting monk seals on each of the main Hawaiian Islands.
- ♦ Volunteers will be assigned to a beach location & asked to fill out a sightings form and take digital images of seals.
- ♦ Join us and support Hawaiian monk seal conservation.

Contact David Schofield at

email: david.schofield@noaa.gov



NOAA partners with the Marine Mammal Center for Hawaiian monk seal conservation research and support. For more information on making a contribution to help recover these endangered seals, please go this web site: www.marinemammalcenter.org/waystogive/donate.asp and be sure to note that your donation is for Hawaiian monk seal recovery.