



# Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network Activity update

*"Dedicated to humane marine mammal Response in the  
Hawaiian Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands"*

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## Elephant seal on Molokai

On 2 January, 2006, a seal was reported from Molokai as stranded and with numerous large wounds. NOAA contract veterinarian Bob Braun and the PIRO Marine Mammal Response Network Coordinator, David Schofield responded with Guy Hughes of the National Park Service to discover an elephant seal that had cookie cutter shark wounds over a large part of its body. The animal swam off before rescuers could provide a full assessment. This is the second confirmed elephant seal sighting in the last 5 years and prior to this there are only anecdotal sightings. There is concern on the presence of this species and the potential for the transfer of disease to Hawaiian monk seals.

## Humpback Whale Disentanglements

From 9-12 February, 2006, the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, the Hawaiian Marine Mammal Consortium, Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Pacific Islands Regional Office and other partners worked to disentangle a humpback whale. The entangled whale eluded the would-be rescuers for 3 days but on 12 February the Disentanglement Team led by Ed Lyman and Dave Mattila freed the whale. On 5 March a second whale was disentangled off of Maui. This was a female that was first spotted off of the Big island on 29 January. Special thanks goes out to the Dolphin Institute for standing by the whale until the team arrived. There have been 5 confirmed entanglements so far this season, 3 of which are currently unaccounted for.

## Kogia sp. on Molokai

On 13 February, 2006 a *Kogia sp.* (pygmy sperm whale or dwarf sperm whale) stranded alive on Moloka'i's Kalaupapa National Park. Park officials responded to the stranding, which was wounded by an approximately 12 ft. tiger shark, a cookie cutter shark, and lacerations sustained potentially from interaction with the reef. While an effort was being made to mount a response, the animal was swept away by the tide and likely perished.

## Whale blubber creates a stink

An approximately 3 ton, 15 feet long by 6 feet wide and 4 feet high mass of rotting tissue and blubber washed up in Waimanalo, Oahu, on 18 February. Jeff Walters (DLNR and HIHWMS) coordinated the removal of the mass to a landfill. Marlee Breese of the Hawaiian Islands Stranding Response Group noted "It was either a small part of a large whale of a large part of a large part of a small whale". Others in the community referred to it as a large piece of "furry tofu." The species could not be identified and it was "too far gone" to be of use for genetic analysis.

808- 983 -2958



Hooked seal 1/17/06  
"before and after"



Photos: Courtesy DLNR



Hunk'o whale

Photo: Courtesy DLNR



Whale Disentanglement  
Team 3/5/06 working to  
free the 5<sup>th</sup> whale of the  
season

Photo: Courtesy  
HIHWNMS



Whale strike of 3/15/06

Photo: Courtesy  
HIHWNMS

## Hawaiian Monk Seal hooking events

On 17 January, the dehooking of a seal with flipper tag I37 took place. The fishing gear removed was a large circle ulua hook, 15 inches of 300# monofilament and lead weight plus "slider" attachment. This seal was born on Kauai in 2005. This pup born in May of 2005 and was also dehooked in almost the same location on North Larsen's beach/Kulikoa point on 20 August, 2005.

On 3 February, a dead monk seal was reported on Kauai near Port Allen. Drs. Bob Braun, Mimi Olry and Laura Schultz DVM, conducted the necropsy with assistance from biologist Marie Skello, Donna Lee, and Lance Matsumoto. No indication of death was found on gross examination of R62. She was a 3 year old subadult female (the same seal that a hook was removed from on 13 August, 2005). A healing fish hook lesion was found on her mouth, indicating that she was most likely the seal that was reported hooked and released of some of the fishing gear on 31, December, 2005. She appeared to be in good condition, with her stomach full of fish that had probably only been there a few hours, as well as the remains of other digested fish. Tissues were sent in for histopathology and toxicology, and hopefully the results will reveal the cause of death. R62, was also probably the same seal that was reported hooked (and cut free of a float bottle) in December.

Hookings of Hawaiian monk seals are a growing problem and at least from these 2 reports it is obvious that the seals can encounter being hooked several times throughout their lives.

## Whale strikes

In the first 3 months of 2006, 5 confirmed whale strikes have occurred. The most recent on 15 March, 2006, as reported by a recreation vessel that observed the animal staying near the surface. The Dolphin Institute was on scene monitoring the animal's respiration rates until the HIHWNMS could get out on the scene to take the photo you see on the previous page. The wounds to this individual seem to be healing and it is hoped that it will survive the trauma. Agency partners have come together to reach out to the press in an attempt to raise awareness on this alarming trend to promote responsible boating practices through the Sanctuary nursery grounds.

## Responder profile

**Kauai** - Dr. Mimi Olry the Kauai Hawaiian Monk Seal Coordinator is on call 24/7 working in remote locations on weekends and holidays. She oversees a team of 50 volunteers. She routinely responds to Hawaiian monk seals haul out events placing protective zones (SPZ) around the seals, collecting data and photos of the seals and providing the information to the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. She has led teams in the monitoring of Hawaiian monk seals pups born on popular beaches, hook removal from seals who have mistaken baited hooks for the prey they consume, and the translocation of seals to remote locations when human disturbance and habituation was a threat.

**Oahu** - Everyday since Good Friday, 2001, "D.B." Dunlap has spent all or part of the day surveying and placing SPZ around seals. He has provided the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center with thousands of monk seal reports and photos. He has escorted scientists to remote beaches and assisted staff with tagging, bleach marking, VHF tracking and has been a single source of the knowledge of the movements, behavior, and identification of individual seals on Oahu.

“Mahalo for your Kokua” goes out to all the volunteers of the Hawaiian monk seal response teams, the stranding response teams and agency partners

Details to follow on the July 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Mammal Response Network Conference.

## Network development

Great strides have been taken with respect to Pacific Islands Marine Mammal Response Network development. Meetings were held with stakeholders that will lead to the development of better organization and strategic planning. In the last several months the following meetings have been held by PIRO in conjunction with other agencies and stake-holders:

- January 9-10 – Stranding response planning meeting
- January 11 – Marine mammals and oil spill response
- January 27 – Kauai'i Monk seal responder team meeting
- February 9, March 18 – Oahu monk seal responder team meeting
- February 22 - Kaho'olawe response and network development
- March 14-15 – Hawaiian Monk Seal agency meeting
- March 16 – Volunteer management training

PIRO is planning to schedule a Marine Mammal Response Network Conference for July 20-22 which will feature island reports, seminars, and workshops that focus on the stranding network, disentanglements, monk seal response and related topics.

## Headquarters news

**EIS Scoping for MMHSRP:** NOAA NMFS headquarters staff traveled to the 6 regions to provide a public presentation on the EIS, NEPA scoping process for the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program. To read the report, with comments from stranding network participants, go to the following website <http://home.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/guidance.htm> and select NEPA, MMHSRP EIS Scoping Report. pdf.

**Prescott Grant:** A grant dedicated to supporting stranding networks has been awarded to LOA and 109h National Stranding Network participants for the past 5 years. The RFP for 2007 is expected in June, 2006. Contact David Schofield of PIRO for more details.

## Response Network facts

In the Pacific Islands Region, 4 humpback whales have been successfully disentangled since the program started in 2002. They are: 2003 (1), 2005 (1) and 2006 (2 – to date). **Source: Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary**

From records that were reported dating back to 1923, the most common marine mammals that strand in the Pacific Islands Region are: Shortfinned pilot whale, Humpback whale, Hawaiian monk seal, spinner dolphin, and the pygmy sperm whale. **Source: Pacific Islands Regional Office**

In 2005, there were 7 hooking events of monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands **Source: Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

In 2005, there were 10 births and 4 deaths (adults) of Hawaiian Monk seals in the Main Hawaiian Islands. **Source: Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**