



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"*

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This is the 3rd issue of the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Mammal Response Network Newsletter. It is produced by the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) and receives written contributions from the many communities and agency partners that form the network. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter or would like to have it distributed to you or partner organizations or groups, please e-mail David Schofield of PIRO (David.Schofield@noaa.gov).

As always, a special mahalo goes out to all those who work tirelessly for the response to and the conservation of marine mammal species in the region.

Hawaiian Monk Seal Updates:

Behavioral Observations and Subsequent Entanglement of RO32.

Oahu Monk Seal Response Team: DB Dunlap, Volunteer

Pacific Islands Regional Office: David Schofield

After 7 weeks of "sun up" to "sun down" coverage by Oahu Monk Seal Response volunteers (see last issue), RO32 was relocated to Rabbit Island by members of NOAA PIRO and PIFSC as well as assistance from volunteers. This decision was based on the fact the pup had been entangled in fishing line at 4 weeks of age and abandoned fishing line was thought to be a risk in the near by area. Also, this was known as a high human use area, and Rabbit Island offered the opportunity for the pup to interact with other seals. Unfortunately, the pup ran into entanglement issues in the body of water inbetween Waimanalo and Rabbit Island as well, which caused her death. The following is an overview of the behavior of the pup and her acclimation to Rabbit Island and the circumstances leading to her death.



Since her relocation to Rabbit Island on 7-23-06, RO32 (also known by some as "Penelope") had shown up on Rabbit Island nearly everyday. She appeared to be active and healthy, and her behavior was that of any 4 1/2 month old, populated islands critter. The most remarkable change in appearance, since her Turtle Bay days was her size and color. While she retained some of her "baby chub", her body shape had begun toward the more usual yearling look. Her color also changed. When the Turtle Bay volunteers last saw her she had just done her first

molt and had gotten the dark charcoal upper body with the whitish belly. She began to turn tannish brown as her coat aged. Though she was growing up, she still retained that big eyed, youngster "attitude" and was still recognizable at a distance by her roundness, and that slightly iridescent glow to her coat, when wet. (Photo courtesy John Johnson)



At Rabbit Island, she was observed interacting with nine different animals: four adult females, two adult males and three subadult males. RO32, like all of the others, spent most of the beach time alone or at least well separated from other animals. Her interaction with the adult females had been minimal. The males on the other hand all seem to want to interact with her. RV08 (1 1/2), R117 (2 1/2), RE74 (4), and RM38 (5) all entered her life within her first two days on the island, and daily play and swim sessions have been the norm. At first, the young males initiated the interactions, rolling and playing, and engaging in mock fighting just as she did with her mom back in the keiki pool at Turtle Bay. These beach interactions invariably moved into the water and often lasted one to two hours before she hauled out to nap again. The males usually initiated the process, but with the younger guys, like R117 and especially RV08, RO32 might very well have been the instigator.

On October 2, 2006, two significant observations were made. For the first time documented since her move, she was seen away from Rabbit Island. At about 1500, she appeared at the Makai Research Pier. She was swimming around and under the pier, and all the fishermen were going nuts, since many had never seen a Hawaiian monk seal before. Although there were no hook problems, another potential problem did develop. She found a piece of "ghost net", abandoned and caught in the breakwater rocks, directly below the helipad where old Magnum fans watched TC land his helicopter. She was observed munching on fish (picture above) that she found in the net. **Steven Rizea**, one of the engineers at Makai Ocean Engineering, went into the water after the seal moved away and cut away the net and we hauled it up (picture above). A special thanks goes out to Steve!

Unfortunately, 2 weeks after the report of the interaction with a net near the Makai Pier, PIRO Marine Mammal Response Network received a report early on October 16, 2006, by the State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources' (DLNR) Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) officers, who had received a tip from a concerned diver who witnessed a dead seal in a gill net the day before in an area to the west of the previous net and about 200 yards off the jetty on the east bank of the channel. Staff from PIRO and DOCARE met at the Makai Research Pier to discuss a plan to search for the net. After several hours of searching, all worst fears were realized when the body of RO32 was found in the net in 12 feet of water depth (picture below). This was not the same abandoned net as the one retrieved by Steven Rizea but a net that was free floating and had several fish and a 2.5 ft white tip reef shark, which also entangled and drowned.



Photos: DOCARE, PIRO

The tragic end to this five-month-old reflects gravely on the severe level of impacts to this endangered species. As described in the last newsletter issue, R032 was disentangled from a fishing line while still with its mother at 4 weeks of age near Turtle Bay. In just five short months, at least three interactions with fishing gear are known for this pup. Ironically, R032's sibling who resides on Kauai, has been dehooked twice and was nearly caught in a net just one month ago. We all must remain ever diligent to remove all derelict fishing gear from the water, and if a net is set, to make sure it is checked frequently. Normally, Monk seals focus on species that live on or near the bottom of the ocean and are often cryptic in nature (hide under sand or rocks). But if they find a net with fish, it can be just like a free meal at the buffet line. Some seals will feed in nets putting them at risk for entanglement. Remember that you can control interactions with monk seals through the responsible use of lines and nets.

Maui Monk Seal on the Move

Maui Monk Seal Watch Program: Nicole Davis, volunteer



An adult, female Hawaiian monk seal, identified as RO11, also known as “West Maui Seal”, has certainly covered the entire West side of Maui this year. She was observed by the Maui Monk Seal Watch Team on the Southwest shore back in March, first in Wailea and then in Makena a couple of weeks later. Just recently in October, she was observed again on the Northwest shore at Honokowai and was in the process of molting. RO11 is not tagged but she does have 3 distinct cookie cutter shark bite scars that clearly identify her. She has also been seen in the past, and even pupped on the island of Molokai as recently as 2005.

Managing Monk Seal Pups on Kauai

Kauai Monk Seal Coordinator: Mimi Olry



Volunteers are celebrating their 5th birth for Kauai in 2006, with a pup born on a remote beach at Kipu Kai Ranch. While there is no public access by land, it is accessible by boat, and like all births, there is the challenge of managing the protection of the mother/pup pair. Often we find conflicts between monk seals and ocean users, such as fishermen, commercial boat tour operators, private boaters and divers. To this end, the newly organized "Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation Hui" is working to develop outreach materials to disperse to boat and dive tour businesses.

We also plan to increase contacts with these operators to encourage communications about monk seal facts and sightings on Kauai and Niihau.

The volunteers also continue to provide outreach materials and barbless hooks developed by the NOAA Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) at the various fishing tournaments. The hope is to increase outreach efforts to fishing supply stores to foster monk seal conservation. It is a challenge to comprehend the many cultural beliefs and practices on Kauai, and we are beginning to network with the public to improve our understanding and outreach efforts.

The image above shows a monk seal mother with her pup and vocalizing at a passerby, an indication that she has been disturbed and is defending her pup. Please stay at least 50 yards away at all times.

Pupping Event on the Big Island

Big Island Marine Mammal Response Network: Melissa Netze volunteer /UH Hilo student

Over the course of 47 days, a group of University of Hawaii at Hilo (UHH) students and members of the local community monitored a Big Island resident monk seal, R015, and her pup at Papaikou Beach. Monitoring efforts were led by a senior undergraduate Marine Science student, **Melissa Netze**, and her assistant, **Julien Christopher**. Other volunteers that played a large part in monitoring and data collection include but were not limited to: **Trisha Atwood, Kalmia Beets, Mari Christopher, Andrew Fredell, Ann Jenkins, Wes Jenkins, Fran Kinney, Maliea Larish, Wendy Marks, Levi McWhorter, Pat Morgan, Lisa Muehlstein, and Pat Richardson**. During the course of the pupping event, data were recorded on nursing behavior (duration, frequency, cause of initiation and termination), mom-pup interactions, duration of time spent in the water, and human disturbances. Trends on these behaviors are being investigated and compared for the extent of the pupping event to see how they vary week by week. Nursing behaviors and time spent in the water are also being compared to human disturbances to see what effect, if any, anthropogenic influence may play on a pupping event.



There were many challenges associated with this monitoring effort. For instance, the site where R015 chose to have her pup was on a small, popular surf beach, frequented by the local community. Access to the site was gained by walking through private property. The beach itself is bordered by a large stream with questionable water quality, and fronted by a deep bay with high wave activity. Because of the large waves and lack of shallow water, the pup was taught by its mother to swim in the river opposed to the ocean. The majority of the community was supportive of our efforts and often thanked the volunteers for being there, even though

some of the younger surfers were annoyed by the presence of the seals and resented the volunteers. In spite of the challenges, the rearing event was a success. The pup nursed for 47 days and once the weaning process concluded, mom took off leaving behind a very fat, seemingly healthy pup.

Relocation of Hawaiian Monk Seal Pup “O42”

Big Island Marine Mammal Response Network: Trisha Atwood volunteer /UH Hilo student

The Papaikou pup was relocated by NOAA PIRO, PIFSC (under federal permits) and DNLR's Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) from her birthplace on a river at Papaikou Beach on the east side of the Big Island to the Lighthouse Beach on the Kohala Coast on September 7th, 2006, shortly after she was weaned by her mother. The move was necessary to minimize her contact with humans and to remove her from the threat of disease posed by the river. A satellite transmitter and a radio transmitter were attached to her back to facilitate post-release monitoring. The pup moved to Kapania Beach where there was again concern for human interaction and a stream that posed a disease threat. Relocation occurred a second time on Tuesday, September 19, 2006, to a beach near Mile Marker 12, which is three miles south of Lapakahi State Park

On September 7, 2006 at 6:42 a.m. on the Big Island of Hawai'i members of NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office (**David Schofield**), The Department of Aquatic Resources (**Justin Viezbicke**), The University of Hawai'i at Hilo faculty and students led by **Dr. Jason Turner** and student **Melissa Netze**, students and community volunteers, and a team of veterinarians (**Drs. Bob Braun, Gregg Levine and Mimi Olry**) met at the overlook of Papa'ikou Beach to the collection, safety precautions and the relocation events for the female Hawaiian monk seal pup flipper tagged “042”. Following the meeting, the relocation team made their way to the staging area located adjacent to the river at the base of the hill. Members of the team reassemble to discuss a plan of action for collecting the pup, which had encircled itself at low tide between the beach and a metal rail some distance up the river. At 6:57 a.m. the capture team departed the staging area, by 7:00 a.m. the members had contained the pup using a stretcher net, and by 7:04 a.m. the team had returned to the staging area where the hoop net was removed and further immobilization of the animal was undertaken by a team led by **John Henderson** located at the head, torso, with help from other team members on the posterior end of the animal. At 7:05 a.m. veterinary staff administered a light sedative to the pup, followed by a blood sample, anterior orifice swabbing, anal and vaginal swabbing, a fecal sample, two tissue biopsy samples, and a length measurement which ended this portion of the physical evaluation at 7:14 a.m. Immediately following the length measurement, **Dr. Charles Littnan** began preparations for the attachment of a radio transmitter, satellite tag and time depth recorder, which was secured onto the dorsal side of the pup at 7:28 a.m.. From 7:29-7:32 a.m. the pup was administered a left and a right flipper tag (042 LHF & 043 RHF respectfully), and a right posterior pit tag (like a microchip in a dog). The physical examination of the pup was fully completed at 7:33 a.m. with a girth measurement.

Relocation of the pup began at 7:34 a.m., with the transport of the pup up a steep hill to a holding container. From 7:55 a.m. to 10:09 a.m. the seal pup was transported by truck from Papa'ikou Beach located on the east coast of the Island, to Light House Beach located on the northern coast of the Island. Beginning at 7:55 a.m., respiratory rates of the seal pup were recorded for one minute periods every fifteen minutes by **Melissa Netze**, and with veterinary oversight by **Drs. Mimi Olry and Gregg Levine** until the arrival at Light House Beach. At 10:18 a.m. the pup was released at the waters edge using a stretcher net. The relocation process was declared completed with the stipulation that post observations would continue.

Post Release Monitoring of the Big Island Pup “042”

Big Island Marine Mammal Response Network: Anne Jenkins, Volunteer



Big island reponse program volunteers have monitored the pup's movements since the time of its first relocation. For the first three days, she was observed swimming, diving, and resting at the location of release at the western base of the lighthouse. No sighting was made on the fourth day. On the fifth day, the pup was located at

Kapanaia Bay in the river. There were quite a few surfers there, and she was becoming a little too curious about humans. After five days at Kapanaia Bay, it was decided that the pup should be moved again, primarily due to the threat of human contact and disease from the river as she showed no interest in heading out to sea to explore the coast. She was moved to an area near Lapakahi state park.



For the next 17 days she remained in that area. On 13 different days, she was observed resting, foraging, and swimming. Her coat appeared healthy, her eyes were bright, she moved about normally, and she seemed to be gaining weight. On a couple of occasions she was observed foraging and eating. The radio signal cannot be detected when the animal is underwater, and it was assumed that the pup was diving for food in the deeper water on the other days.

On September 24, 2006, it was discovered that the pup had lost her satellite transmitter antenna. She could now only be tracked on the ground using the radio antenna.

On October 10, 2006, a strong signal from her radio transmitter was picked up on the beach at the Farimont Orchid, but no sighting was made. On October 13, 2006, a strong signal was again received, this time at Honokaope Bay. On October 14, 2006, she was sighted on a small beach north of Mahukona Park. She appeared to still be feeding herself adequately and to be in good health.

Since the earthquake on October 15, 2006, there were difficulties in getting out to the site, as well as issues with the radio transmitter. A vessel based survey may take place in mid-November if the seal is not located by land-based efforts.

Correction: In the first issue of the PIR Marine Mammal Responders Newsletter (January –February 2006), the following statement was made: “*This is the second confirmed elephant seal sighting in the last five years and prior to this there are only anecdotal sightings.*” There has been another confirmed sighting of an elephant seal in the Hawaiian Islands. A tagged juvenile female elephant seal was observed and photographed at Midway Atoll by George Balazs in February 1978 (the tag numbers were reported and the seal was originally tagged on San Miguel Island). Mahalo to Thea Johanos –Kam (PIFSC) for bringing this to our attention.

[Cetacean Strandings](#)

Pygmy Sperm Whale Stranding In Hanalei Bay 28 June, 2006 **Pacific Islands Regional Office: David Schofield**

On July 28, 2006, there was a report of an unidentified stranding in Hanalei Bay, Kauai, that was first reported as a pilot whale or dolphin and then a melonheaded whale. This picture was submitted to the NOAA PIFSC and PIRO. Based on the “triangular” head and distance from the blowhole to the dorsal fin, it was positively identified as a pygmy or dwarf sperm whale of the *Kogia* species. The whale was observed bleeding and barrel-rolling in the water before it stranded.



Some accounts suggested that a second animal was involved, although this was never confirmed. The individual here was helped off the beach and back into deeper water by well-meaning members of the Hanalei Canoe Club, some of whom helped with the melonheaded whale event in 2004. Given the amount of blood loss from the descriptions and shown here in the picture, it is unlikely that the whale survived. Volunteers combed the beach for several days after the event with no luck in finding the whale. Beach users encountering injured whales like this are encouraged to not push whales or dolphins off the beach, but rather they should call the Hawaii Stranding Hotline at 888-256-9840 for help. Special thanks to members of the Hanalei Canoe Club for their ongoing support!

Pygmy Killer Whale Stranding 23 July, 2006

Pacific Islands Regional Office: David Schofield



On July 23, 2006, a dead adult female pygmy killer whale was discovered stranded on a rocky section of Makapuu, Oahu. The carcass was retrieved, and a thorough investigation was undertaken to determine the cause of death. The 7.4 ft whale likely weighed around 200 lbs. Wear of the teeth and visual observation of the carcass indicated that the whale was of old age. All initial information indicated that this was a very sick animal and that it had been ill for some time prior to stranding.

In accordance with the NOAA Pacific Islands Region Stranding Protocol, a computed tomography (CT) scan of the animal was performed at a local radiology center, and this was followed by a necropsy conducted at the Hawaii Pacific University (HPU). The CT scan was performed by **Dr. Robert DeJournett** and **Karl LaCour** of Ko'olau Radiology. The gross necropsy was led by **Dr. Bob Braun**, and included a support team of marine mammal experts: **Dr. Gregg Levine** (NMFS PIRO contract veterinarian), **Dr. Kristi West** (Hawaii Pacific University), **Jeff Pawloski** and **Dr. Beth Doescher** (Sea Life Park), **Charley Potter** (Smithsonian Institution), and **David Schofield** (NMFS PIRO).

The initial findings from the CT scan and gross necropsy showed an apparent long-term infection in the right lung of the animal, with abnormalities of the chest cavity, heart, liver, and other organs. This infection appears to have resulted in a partial collapse of the lung causing a pneumothorax and an accumulation of a large amount of fluid in the animal's chest. Abnormalities in the animal's spinal column resulted in a twisted body condition (scoliosis), and, although noteworthy, this was not related to the death of the animal. In addition, there were numerous cookie cutter shark wounds (which are not unusual), as well as five larger shark wounds, which likely occurred around the time of or soon after the animal's death (note picture above and 3-5 shark bites at the dorsal peduncle of the animal). Biological samples were taken from the animal and were analyzed and reviewed by experts in various parts of the country, most notably the NOAA Center for Marine Animal Health at the University of Tennessee. **Dr. Dave Rotstein** provided expertise to further investigate the cause of the animal's death and to identify the type of lesions and infective agents (e.g. viruses, bacteria, or fungi) involved. Tissues were also archived at HPU for future examinations.

Responder Profile

This section is to highlight the outstanding contributions of staff and volunteers in realm of marine mammal response.

Good Luck Erin!



PIFSC and PIRO bid farewell and best wishes to **Erin Moreland**, who recently left Hawaii to pursue work with the National Marine Mammal Lab in Seattle, WA, where she hopes to pursue work in her field of study which is contaminants in marine mammals. Currently, she is working on population assessments of pinnipeds of the northwest and will work with the Polar Ecosystem Project. She spent four field seasons in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands as a field biologist with monk seals and most recently,



over the past year, made vast contributions to the monk seal sighting database and response network. She will be greatly missed, and her work has created the standard for the rest of us to maintain. (Note: image of bleaching activity is under authorization of NMFS permit # 848-1695—02)

Big Island:

Nan Howell has volunteered for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and the DAR. She helps with outreach in schools, community educational programs tending outreach booths and even helps with office tasks. Her most recent major contribution is the coordinating the Papaikou Beach pup post-release monitoring volunteer effort.

Melissa Netze is a volunteer and UHH student. She spent nearly everyday with the recent pupping event at Papaikou Beach and will present the findings of her student project centered on the rearing of the pup on Oahu sometime in the spring of next year.

Oahu:

Veteran Hawaiian monk seal field biologists **Aaron Dietrich** and **Gretchen Johnston** responded to a report of dead monk seal on Molokai on September 12, 2006. It was R6AH (tags 6AH/6AI). Necropsy results are pending. R6AH was an adult male who was tagged on Kahoolawe on August 15, 2005, and satellite-tagged on November 29, 2006. He was seen on Kahoolawe, Maui and Molokai within the past year (Source: PIFSC).

Molokai:

Karen Ashley of Molokai routinely hikes all over Molokai, specifically Laau Point. She is responsible for many of the reports of Hawaiian monk seals and strandings that PIFSC and PIRO receive from Molokai.

Network Development

The Marine Mammal responders meeting from July 19-22, 2006, was a great success. Over 85 attendees from the main Hawaiian Islands, Guam, American Samoa, Samoa, New Zealand, Northern Marianna Islands and the mainland US were in attendance. Participants were engaged in a necropsy workshop and a stranded animal simulation as seen in the images on the next page

along with cetacean and monk seal workshops. Network leaders gave overviews of incidences and issues from their respective islands/countries and a case study section was provided on a wide variety of cetacean and monk seal findings and experiences. Evaluations provided to attendees demonstrated resounding approval and the request for future gatherings for sharing information.



Left: Network participants from Oahu (Darin Padula, PIFSC), Molokai (Eric Brown, Kalaupapa NPS) and Maui (Joe Fell McDonald, DLNR, and Allan Ligon, HIHWNMS) carry a "dolphin in distress" (HPU student Stephanie Harrison) during the field component of the conference (mass stranding and beach response). Right: Sue Barco of the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Program and Katie Touhy of the Cape Cod Stranding Network address the trainees to debrief the stranding drill.

[Headquarters News](#)

John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program 2007 Competitive Solicitation:

NMFS announced a request for grant proposals in the NOAA Omnibus Federal Register notice, which was published on June 12, 2006. The deadline for receipt or postmark on proposals was 11:59 p.m., September 27, 2006. This was the second year of the competitive program with online application submission through www.grants.gov (although applicants had the option of submitting a paper copy if they could not use the electronic system). Program staff fielded many inquiries relating to the program and the application process. Eligible applicants are members of the marine mammal stranding network or researchers utilizing data or samples from stranded marine mammals working collaboratively with the stranding network. Only two applicants reported submission problems, and both problems were deemed to be due to the government. Therefore, the applications were accepted after the deadline. While the Prescott Program has historically been funded at \$4 million (resulting in approximately 40 awards/year), the Senate budget bill has allocated only \$2 million in FY07, which would result in about 18 funded awards, having dramatic effects on the stranding network. A total of 80 proposals requesting \$7,246,480 were received in the competition. The proposals are undergoing the initial screening for eligibility and cost-share requirements, and we are preparing for the external peer review, which will be held December 4-7, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia.

[Response Network Facts](#)

ALERT: The First Humpback Whale of the Season

The first humpback whale of the season was observed off Maui on 11 October about three miles off Ka'anapali Beach in the Auau Channel. Last year was a record high for whale strikes, so please be on alert.

2005-2006 Humpback Season Summary (Source: HIHWNMS and PIRO)

- 6 confirmed collisions total, 1 more suspected
- 5 collisions off Maui
- 1 collision off Kauai
- At least 2 collision involved injured calves
- 4 collisions involved whale watch vessels

Reported Incidents

1. January 4, 2006 – leeward Maui, 12 nm. Whale watch boat.
2. January 17, 2006 – west Kauai, off PMRF ~1/2 mile. Whale watch boat.
3. February 13, 2006 – outside Maalaea Harbor, Maui. USCG vessel.
4. March 9, 2006 – Maalaea Bay, Maui. Calf injured. Whale watch boat.
5. March 15, 2006 – Maui. Calf injured. Unknown vessel.
6. March 25, 2006 – off Lahaina, Maui. Whale watch boat.

For All Boaters – Avoiding Vessel Whale Collisions and Close Approaches

Keep a sharp lookout – Vessel operators should always stay vigilant for whales and other collision hazards. Look ahead for “blows” (puffs of mist), dorsal fins, tails, etc. Operators are further advised to post at least one dedicated whale lookout person, in addition to the operator, from November through May.

Watch your speed - 13 knots or less may reduce injury potential.

Stay at the helm – Keep hands on the wheel and throttle at all times, and be ready to take action immediately to avoid a whale in your path.

Keep your distance - Once whales are sighted, stay at least 100 yards away.

Stop immediately if within 100 yards of a humpback whale - Use prudent seamanship to decide to either move away slowly or wait for the whale to move away.

Go around whales from behind - While maintaining 100 yards distance, if you encounter whales in your path, do not attempt to run out in front of whales to get past them.

Warn other vessels – Use appropriate VHF radio protocol or other means to alert other vessels that may not be aware of whales in their path.

Don't assume whales see you or will get out of the way - Calves are especially vulnerable since they are curious and may not have learned to be cautious of vessels.

Plan ahead – There may be delays in transit due to whale encounters, and avoid nighttime operations if possible.

Call the NOAA Hotline if involved in a collision: 1-888-256-9840 - If a phone call is not possible, hail the US Coast Guard on VHF channel 16.



Photo: HIHWNMS, NOAA's Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program – permit # 932-1489-08

Injured Humpback whale calf with mother after a vessel collision 3/15/06