

Hawaii
Marine
Mammal
ALLIANCE



HMMA Waves

You Can Help Save A Species | Support Hawaii's Endangered Marine Mammals



A badly wounded seal being monitored off western Oahu in October.

HMMA to the rescue

Two Hawaiian monk seals on the westside of Oahu had close calls this autumn.

In early October, a well-known male seal on Oahu, official ID RE74, nicknamed Benny, was sighted on a Waianae beach with a fish hook in his mouth. HMMA staff and volunteers searched beaches daily until our field response team found him at a location where scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) could gain access for medical intervention.

On Oct. 8, Benny was transported to the NOAA Inouye Regional Center on Ford Island, Oahu. It was determined that the hook had been ingested, so Benny had to undergo abdominal surgery. After a full recovery, he was released and is once again seen at his usual haul-out spots around the island.

Continued on page 2

Monk seal facts & stats

- The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the most endangered marine animals in the world. Only about 1,400 are left.
- Part of the "true seal" family (*Phocidae*), they are one of only two monk seal species left on earth. The other is the Mediterranean monk seal.
- Life expectancy is 30-35 years, but few seals live this long in the wild.
- The Hawaiian monk seal and the hoary bat are the only two mammals native to Hawaii.

Support the work of HMMA by going to monkseals.org and clicking on "Donate Now."



A fully recovered Benny basks in the sun at Ko'olina in December.
Photo by Karen Kalanta



A healing Hawaiian monk seal, nicknamed Lanakila (meaning *triumph*) rests on the Big Island in late December. Photo by Julie Steelman

Rescue, continued

About a week after Benny’s hooking incident, a swimmer notified HMMA about a seal with a large wound on its back. The animal was spotted just off shore near Makua. NOAA suspects the wound was caused by an attack from one or more male seals, known as mobbing. Our volunteers located and identified the animal as a female with ID R8HE, a seal seen only rarely on Oahu. The HMMA team continued to track her until she was in a location where NOAA could administer her a shot of antibiotics.

The HMMA field response team tracked her for nearly two weeks from the western shores of Oahu to the Diamond Head area. She was then not seen for several weeks until she turned up on the Big Island Dec. 22. According to NOAA, she is healing very well given the extent of her injuries but will probably always sport a large scar.



Benny at Paradise Cove, Oahu, during a second hooking incident this fall. In September, HMMA volunteers reported him with fishing line coming out of his mouth and wrapped around his hind flippers. Within a few hours, a NOAA field response team member arrived to cut and remove the line. A few days later at a different westside beach, NOAA was able to do a full assessment with a portable X-ray machine. The animal had lost the hook, showing that there may be more seals hooked than those who require intervention. (NOAA/NMFS Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program Permit No. 18786-01) Photo by Robyn Squire

HMMA impact

Here’s what we’ve accomplished from the start of our 3-year grant from NOAA on May 23 through Dec. 31, 2016.

- ✦ **Hawaiian monk seal sightings reported:** 1,445 (an average of about 6.5 per day)
- ✦ **Responses dispatched to sightings:** 994 (based on location and time of day, at least one volunteer was dispatched about 69% of the time, or the volunteer made the sighting)
- ✦ **Volunteers engaged in responses:** 1,410 (an average of 6.3 people per day)
- ✦ **Members of the public engaged on responses:** 12,841
- ✦ **Students and adults engaged during school outreach:** 1,666
- ✦ **Members of the public engaged with all of our activities:** 16,453 (an average of 74 people per day)
- ✦ **Volunteer hours:** 6,401
- ✦ **Volunteer miles driven:** 21,283

A Helpful Hook

Due to the frequency of monk seals and sea turtles being hooked and entangled, fishermen are strongly encouraged to use barbless circle hooks. Barbless hooks help minimize hooking injuries and have been proven to be effective in catching fish and retaining bait. To learn more, visit the Barbless Hook Project at www.pifsc.noaa.gov/barbless_circle_hook

Toxoplasmosis: a deadly threat to Hawaiian monk seals

A disease spread through cat feces is a significant threat to the endangered Hawaiian monk seal population. Here's what you need to know.

What is toxoplasmosis?

It's a disease caused by the *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite, which reproduces only in the bodies of domestic cats (feral and outdoor pet cats). The *T. gondii* eggs pass through cat feces or when predators (or humans) consume infected non-feline species. Toxoplasmosis can cause illness or death in Hawaiian monk seals and other animals, including humans. The disease is also killing rare native-Hawaiian bird species. There is no vaccine or cure for monk seals at this time.

How many monk seals have been infected?

Since 2004, eight Hawaiian monk seals have died from toxoplasmosis. Though unconfirmed, there are another three deaths that are likely. Although this doesn't seem like a large number, it has a big impact on an endangered species with only about 1,400 left in existence.

How are seals exposed?

Hawaiian monk seals could become exposed by consuming *T. gondii* eggs directly from the water or by consuming egg-contaminated prey. The parasite can enter the ocean environment via runoff from soil, even from sources far inland. As long as free-ranging cats are in the environment, they provide the opportunity for toxoplasmosis to spread.



Photo by Jason O'Rourke

How can we limit toxoplasmosis?

Oahu has an estimated 350,000 feral cats alone. Any effort to remove or control the feral cat colonies reduces the risk of transmission, and provides an overall benefit to monk seal conservation. Here's what you can do:

- Do not release unwanted cats into the wild. Instead, take them to a shelter, animal rescue, or Humane Society.
- Do not let your domestic cat roam outside.
- Support programs to spay and neuter cats.

Are humans at risk?

The parasite can infect humans through eating contaminated food, such as shellfish, though many people never know they're infected. The greatest health implications are for pregnant or immune-compromised persons. Go to cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis for more information.

HMMA is always looking for volunteers to help with field response, educational outreach, and more. Go to monkseals.org for information and to sign up!

Report a sighting of a Hawaiian monk seal. Call (808) 220-7802 or go to monkseals.org/report from the browser on your computer or smartphone.

Contact Information

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Benny



Holokai (Sea Farer)



Honey Girl

Six ways you can help

Hawaii Marine Mammal Alliance counts on the generous support of people like you. Get involved and make a difference today!

1. Donate

You can make a one-time or recurring, tax-deductible donation at monkseals.org. Donations help us...

- Offset the costs of equipment, staff expenses, gasoline, tools, online systems and more.
- Produce the materials and purchase equipment used in education and outreach.
- Create a revenue base to pursue matching funds from government agencies and private foundations.
- Develop fundraising campaigns and special awareness events.

2. Adopt a monk seal

For \$150 a year, you get an HMMA "You Can Help Save A Species" T-shirt; photos of your adopted Hawaiian monk seal to use as your computer desktop, phone screen and more; plus the satisfaction of helping one of three popular seals who are "VIPs" on Oahu (pictured at left).

3. Join as a member

There are three levels of annual membership, ranging from \$50 to \$300. At each level you get thank-you gifts.

4. Volunteer some time

Our volunteers are at the core of our work, assisting with field response, dispatch, education, outreach, fundraising and corporate partnership. Sign up today at monkseals.org!

5. Become a corporate sponsor or partner

Whether it's with matching donations, a grant, sponsorship or a contribution of supplies or equipment, your company can help in our cause and get public recognition. Please email info@monkseals.org.

6. Shop

HMMA has been accepted by Amazon into its AmazonSmile program. This means Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchases to our nonprofit at no cost to you. So, next time you want to shop at Amazon, please go to smile.amazon.com instead to purchase the same items using your same amazon.com account. All of Amazon's products are eligible and the price you pay for products is the same. When you log in you will be asked which nonprofit you want to help. Type in **Hawaii Marine Mammal Alliance** where prompted.

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Mahalo!