



# 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 Marina Islands"*

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## Contributors this issue

David Schofield

Wende Goo

*PIRO*

Dr. Jeff Walters  
and David Nichols  
*State DLNR*

Bob Braun

Erin Moreland  
*Pacific Islands  
Fisheries Science  
Center*

Dr. Kristi West  
*Hawaii Pacific  
University*

## Twin female Hawaiian monk seal pups under care on Oahu (Dr. Bob Braun, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center)

Twin female monk seal pups were brought to Oahu from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Midway Atoll Wildlife Refuge. NOAA staff at the refuge determined that the pair were underweight and their survival in danger. The FWS provided essential support for on-site capture and holding of the twins and the United States Coast Guard (USCG) District 14 command flew the animals to Honolulu aboard a USCG C-130.

Female monk seals PO22 and PO26 are settling into a routine and are benefiting from the care they have received. Overseen by the NOAA Marine Mammal Research Program staff, their daily routine begins just before 7 am when the water level is raised to give them an opportunity to exercise prior to their 8 am feeding of human-quality herring, prepared headless, finless, and without scales to make it calorie rich and very digestible. While swimming in their 4 ft deep pool, they are offered the fish, then shred and swallow it without assistance. They usually haul out on a dry platform by around 9 am and bask in the sun while occasionally swimming to cool off throughout the day. By 3 pm, the twins are then fed again.

Each seal is eating about 5 ½ lbs of herring a day divided into three meals. At last weighing, each had gained about 14 lbs since being brought into captive care. They are curious and constantly investigate the various objects we exchange in their environment throughout the day.



Twin pups at rest in Oahu NOAA Hawaiian Monk Seal care facility

## Pup born on Oahu is entangled in monofilament at 4 weeks of age

A female Hawaiian monk seal pup born on Oahu's north shore to two-time mother "N7" or R5AY, turned four weeks old on June 29, 2006. Although the pup and mother were doing well on that day, it also marked the first time in the young pup's life where she encountered an anthropogenic threat.

Mark Wells, volunteer (8 am -12 pm shift) and Hawaii Pacific University student, reported that the pup was wrapped in fishing line. While not life threatening the fishing line was beginning to push down on the pup's back, taut against its skin. Given enough time, it might have the potential to turn into a life threatening situation.



The images above show how she was wrapped: a single line of monofilament encircled under her right flipper and "sashed up" as well as across and just above her left flipper. On her back was a bird's nest of line. The pup was in the exact position (right side down and back against mom, pup's head to mom's rear) as shown in this picture taken a few weeks prior to the entanglement.

Luckily, it was a single wrap and involved no appendages. NOAA PIRO and PIFSC decided that the line might be removed while the mom and pup were asleep. The pup was approached, and the single line was cut with a seatbelt cutter (a hook-like tool with a smooth outer edge with 2 blades on the inside, similar to those used by the large whale disentanglement team). Volunteers Shawn Bonnel and Jessica Smith provided support.

The pup remained asleep through the whole ordeal. The mother reared up and vocalized twice, although never moving from her spot. She then went back to sleep almost immediately. The pup remained still and didn't react to the two responses from the mother. The pup was checked the next morning and found completely disentangled from the line.

This incident sends a harsh message of the reality of the constant threats to this species, especially since this pup was impacted by an anthropogenic source before being weaned. All the more, this reinforces our need to inform, alert and foster community involvement. "It is going to take all of us to save this species".

## History of female Hawaiian monk seals that have given birth on Oahu (Erin Moreland, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center)

**RH58** was born on Maha'ulepu beach on Kauai in 2000 to an unidentified seal. She was translocated to a more remote beach on the north shore of Kauai where she returned this year to have her first pup (RO12), who was also the first pup of the season in the main Hawaiian Islands. She has been seen on both Oahu and Kauai throughout her life.

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

**R017** is an adult female who is not tagged. She has a series of scars and natural bleach marks that make her easy to identify. She has two large pit scars most likely caused by cookie cutter sharks: one on the back of her neck and one on her right side. Her natural bleach mark is on her left side and is our equivalent of a birth mark (the fur is solid white or salt and pepper). She has additional scarring around her face and fore flippers that make her distinctive. She was bleached in 2005 with the identifier N5 on both shoulders and a double girdle (two lines over her pelvis). She recently gave birth to RO20 in April, 2006.

**RQ21** was born on Molokai in 1997, and she was the first pup produced by seal R006. She had her first pup in 2003 (RR66) on Molokai, and continues to give birth in this area: to seal RI11 in 2004, seal RV06 in 2005, and seal RO22 in 2006.

**RK30** was first identified in 2004 on Kauai as an adult. Our first record of her pupping was this year. She gave birth on a remote beach along the Napali Coast. In June, her pup was tagged RO26.

**RY30** was born in 1998, the second pup of R006. She had her first pup, RR64, in 2003 at age five; her second pup, RI15, in 2004; her third pup, RV00, in 2005; and her fourth, RO30, in April 2006. All pups were born at Kalaupapa, Molokai, on the same beach where she was born.

**RK06** was first identified as an adult in 2002 on Kauai. Her first known pup was born in 2004 on the Napali Coast of Kauai, and she has continued to pup in this remote location. Her 2004 and 2005 pups could not be tagged due to the challenges associated with the Napali Coast. She gave birth to RO28 in May, 2006 on the north shore of Kauai.

**RK04** was first identified as an adult in 2000. The same year, she produced pup RH44 on the popular Poipu Beach of Kauai. She continued to pup in this location in 2001 (RM68) and 2004 (RI21). She pupped at Kipu Kai on Kauai in 2002 (RE74), and did not pup in 2003 or 2005. She pupped this year, 2006, again at Poipu, but her pup was premature and did not survive.

**R5AY** was first seen as an adult in 2002 on Kauai. She was sighted with a hook in her mouth in 2003 on Kauai. While she was captured to remove the hook, she was also tagged. Later in the year she was seen on Oahu. She had her first known pup, RI37, in May 2005 on Kauai. She is currently nursing her second known pup on the North Shore of Oahu.

**R016** is an adult female who is not tagged. She was first identified on Oahu in 2003 as an adult. She pupped on the Big Island in 2003 (RR68) and on Molokai in 2005 (RV12) and in June, 2006. She was bleached in 2005 with an N6 on her left shoulder. She is also identified by a large natural bleach mark on her lower right side.

**R006** was first sighted in 1996 as an adult and pupped every year for eight years from 1997 through 2004, producing 6 females and 2 males. Her pups are: RQ21, RY30, RD32, RH42, RM72, RE72, RR58, and RI25. In late June, 2006 she gave birth again on Molokai. She is currently nursing her pup.

**R010** was first identified in 2003 as an adult on Oahu. She pupped on Rabbit Island that year (RR70), and in 2004 (RI17). Based on changes in her body condition and a long break between sightings, we suspect she may have pupped in 2005 at a remote location, but cannot verify it. She received an N3 bleach mark in 2005 which has helped us keep track of her. She frequents Sandy Beach and west side areas of Oahu, and is currently nursing her pup on the North Shore of Oahu.

## Strandings this quarter

This quarter there have been nine strandings – six monk seals, one striped dolphin, one spinner dolphin, and one pygmy sperm whale. Of the six monk seal strandings, two adults and two subadults and an entangled yearling survived, however, a pup that was premature died shortly after birth. The spinner dolphin was freshly dead when discovered. The striped dolphin found on Oahu was very ill and had to be euthanized. The pygmy sperm whale washed ashore dead on Molokai. Below is a brief review of some of these cases.

### Striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba* stranding on Oahu

On April 23, 2006, between the hours of 0630 and 0930, police officers of the Honolulu Police Department responded to a call and assisted with a beach-stranded striped dolphin. They offered their assistance to the Hawaii Marine Mammal Response Network by providing access to the rescuers and interacting with the public to maintain a safe distance from the dolphin.

As striped dolphins are a deep water species, it was unusual to find an individual stranded alone. After repeated attempts to direct it seaward, it re-stranded on two different occasions, demonstrating that it was very ill and likely suffering. After a veterinary assessment was made, the very difficult decision was made to humanely euthanize the animal. A necropsy (animal autopsy) was performed and results on the cause of stranding are pending.

### Spinner Dolphin *Stenella longirostris* stranding

A spinner dolphin was found floating and dead on April 4, 2006, at 8:30-9 am about 100 yards offshore of Papiha Point, which is the point between Kukio Bay and Kua Bay of the Big Island. The GPS coordinates from the beach were N 19 49.123 and W155 59.889. The animal was found by a surfer from Kukio while he was paddling; the dolphin was found floating vertically with just the rostrum sticking out of the water. Three surfers managed to get the carcass in an outrigger canoe and were able to bring the animal to the beach and put the carcass on ice. Justin Viezbicke of the Hawaii State Division of Aquatic Resources, (DAR) arrived on the scene at approximately 11:15 am and was able to get the following information:

Classification: spinner dolphin  
Sex: female  
Length: 77in  
Girth at axilla: 34.25in  
Girth at max: 38.25in  
Approx. weight: 175lbs.



The general external condition of the animal was good with no significant trauma evident besides one cookie cutter shark bite just anterior and to the right of the genitals (picture above left). There were also two small abrasions/lesions on the lower mandible on the front portion. These wounds are not usually associated with stranding mortality as many healthy animals are found thriving with evidence of

these bites. A necropsy (animal autopsy) was performed and results on the cause of the stranding are pending.

### **Pygmy sperm whale *Kogia breviceps* stranding on Molokai**

An adult male pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) stranded dead on May 20, 2006, at Kalaupapa on the island of Molokai. An initial stranding response was led by the National Park Service. Dr. Kristi West (Hawaii Pacific University) conducted the necropsy on-site at Kalaupapa on May 21, 2006. Assisted by Dr. Eric Brown and other National Park Service volunteers, tissue samples were collected for histopathology, as well as skin and muscle samples for genetic analyses and gonads for life history. The skull was saved for the Smithsonian Institution Marine Mammal Program. Stomach contents were also collected for Cascadia Research Collective (Dr. Robin Baird), and prey items subsequently identified by W.A. Walker. We have tremendously increased our knowledge on the diet of *Kogia breviceps* in Hawaii from this individual necropsy opportunity, emphasizing the value of obtaining as much information as possible from stranding events. This particular individual had 76 total prey items identified from the collected stomach contents, representing 27 different species of fishes, cephalopods and crustaceans. A live *Kogia sp.* also stranded at Kalaupapa in February of 2006, and that animal was pushed back to sea and not seen again.



(Left) Deceased pygmy sperm whale from Kalaupapa, and (Right) stomach contents with a 6 inch pelagic species of shrimp, *Pasiphaea tarda* thought to be found in waters 250-2400 m deep.

### **Responder profile**

**Oahu** – In the striped dolphin stranding event mentioned above, Officer Jack Write entered the water to support the struggling dolphin in shallow water. His efforts made the animal comfortable while the rescue team responded. A. Bustamante, Jr., D. Mauricio and W. Nakagawa also from HPD assisted. Officer Gordon Olayvar of the Marine Corp Base Kaneohe and Officer Wes Munde of DOCARE also provided needed special assistance.

**Molokai** – Special thanks goes out to Bill Puleloa, DAR biologist for his work in collecting samples from two large whales on Molokai earlier this spring.

**Maui** – Special thanks to Hannah Bernard and Joe Fell McDonald for their ongoing efforts with monk seal monitoring on Maui

**Big Island** – Justin Viezbicke of DAR reports that Wendy Marks, and George and

Pat Coch helped with the dolphin carcass retrieval, which was in very bad condition.

**Kauai** – Special thanks to Donna Lee and Milli Johnson who have dedicated years of service to monk seal response covering the west and south coastline reporting haul-outs, taking pictures and setting up seal protection zones.

## Headquarters news

In May 2006, the regional stranding coordinators met in Annapolis, Maryland, to report on milestones and operations within the 6 U.S. Regional Stranding Networks.

## Response Network facts

Volunteers logged over 2,000 hours during the recent mother/pup monitoring operation on the North Shore of Oahu. **Source: Pacific Islands Regional Office**

On 11/9/05 two beaked whale species stranded on Palmyra Atoll's eastern most island. Tissue samples and skeletal remains were sent to PIRO who sent the tissue samples to the genetics lab at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, California and the skull and jaw bones to the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.. It has been determined that these samples may be from a yet to be identified species of beaked whale. More to follow in upcoming issues. **Source: Pacific Islands Regional Office**

The following table is an overview of the pups born in the Main Hawaiian Islands thus far in 2006. The permanent ID is represented by numbers found on the individual's flipper tags and the temporary notation represents the seals bleach mark. **Source: Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

Mom ID		Island	Pup ID		Pup sex	Dates		
Perm	Temp		Perm	Temp		Born	Weaned	Tagged
RH58		Kauai	RO12	V01	M	04/05/06	05/13 - 05/14	05/17/06
R017	N5	Molokai	RO20		M	04/05/06	05/17 - 05/20	05/31/06
RQ21		Molokai	RO22		F	04/12/06	05/ - 05/26	05/31/06
RK30		Kauai	RO26		F	04/22/06	05/26 - 06/07	06/07/06
RY30		Molokai	RO30		F	04/25/06	06/ - 06/07	06/14/06
RK06		Kauai	RO28		F	05/03/06	06/05 - 06/06	06/07/06
RK04		Kauai	KA060D01		F	05/21/06	Died	
R5AY	N7	Oahu			F	06/01/06	Still nursing	