

West Hawaii Today

Saturday, March 27, 2021 | □ Today's Paper | ☁ 71.204°

Hawaii News

Hawaiian monk seal RA20 released from hospital

By [Chelsea Jensen West Hawaii Today cjensen@westhawaii.com](#) | Thursday, March 19, 2020, 12:05 a.m.

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Hawaiian monk seal RA20 was treated for a bacterial infection at The Marine Mammal Center's hospital for Hawaiian monk seal RA20 the endangered species, Ke Kai Ola, located in Kona. RA20 is loaded into a truck for transport to the the endangered species, K release site. (Meagan McGinnis.The Marine Mammal Center/NOAA permit #18786/Special to West Hawaii (Meagan McGinnis.The Ma

Hawaiian monk seal RA20 is back in Kona's crystal blue waters after a short stay at Ke Kai Ola Hawaiian Monk Seal Hospital earlier this month.

The 12-year-old seal, well-known in West Hawaii for rearing successfully two pups at the same Kona beach, made her way back into the water at 7:38 a.m. Wednesday from Ooma Beach, said Laura Sherr, associate director of communications for The Marine Mammal Center, which operates Ke Kai Ola.

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"She went right across the beach and into the water without ever looking back," Sherr said. "She swam around for a couple of minutes and then left the area."

The response team from The Marine Mammal Center will try to monitor her over the next few weeks, though access may be an issue because state parks are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The public can assist by reporting any sightings of RA20, or any other monk seal on Hawaii Island, to the center. Anyone who encounters a seal should keep a safe distance and call or text (808) 987-0765 to report the sighting.

RA20, who is normally spotted near the Fairmont Orchid on the Kohala Coast, was taken to Ke Kai Ola in early March after displaying "abnormal behavior" that persisted for several days, Sherr said. The pinniped appeared to be in need of medical assessment and attention.

“Trained volunteers from our Kona hospital, Ke Kai Ola, monitored RA20 for several days, and following veterinary assessment and in collaboration with NOAA’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program, were able to rescue her and bring her to Ke Kai Ola,” Sherr said. The Marine Mammal Center is the largest marine mammal hospital in the world, and the only partner organization permitted by NOAA to treat and rehabilitate endangered Hawaiian monk seals.

Upon arrival of RA20 at the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority facility, the center’s veterinary team performed a physical examination that showed the seal was suffering from a bacterial infection.

“Based on her history and exam findings, our veterinarians suspect that RA20 may have recently lost a pregnancy. This loss may have either occurred as a result of the infection, or could have led to the infection,” Sherr said. “Reproductive complications are not uncommon for monk seals or marine mammals in general.”

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The monk seal had been spotted basking on beaches in Kona in January, looking rather plump, prompting officials to keep a watchful eye.

RA20, who was born on Kauai and traveled to the Kona Coast, is one of only eight seals who spend the majority of their time around and on Hawaii Island. She is also the mother of two local seals, Manuiwa and Kaulana.

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