



2020  
**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



*Mahalo* (thank you) to our volunteers, partners, supporters, and the organizations that enable our work. Because of you, we've accomplished so much since our start and we had an impactful 2020. Since our first day as an organization in 2016 I have been so impressed by the hard work and determination of our volunteers, interns and staff who devote themselves to the conservation, stewardship, and recovery of Hawaii's protected marine animals and the ocean. In 2020, the difficulties and uncertainties of the global COVID-19 pandemic presented many new challenges and I was very inspired by how our team persevered through these difficult times, with unwavering commitment to our mission.

I am so proud to be a part of HMAR, and I hope you will share my appreciation for what this incredible group of people accomplished in 2020. Our team members continue to volunteer and work overtime manning hotlines, conducting field response and rescue operations, education and outreach, marine debris removal, and other HMAR activities to ensure that we amplify our impact when and where it is needed most. Though the challenges are daunting, we will not passively accept the continued destructive impacts of human activities on our oceans and the animals that call it home. We embrace our *kuleana* (responsibility) to the natural world and will continue to take action and work even harder in the coming years because we are not just helping marine protected animals and the ocean – we're protecting our shared future.

As we complete our first five years of service, our mission still stands: to undertake substantial actions that result in the preservation, recovery, and stewardship of Hawaii's marine protected species and the ocean ecosystem we share. With your support we've been able to develop integrated programs, key partnerships, and strong community support to successfully embrace this mission and produce dramatic accomplishments. And it's all made possible by our volunteers, our supporters, and you.

As we move forward into 2021, we will continue to strive toward making our vision of Hawaii's ocean ecosystem shared in sustainable harmony a reality. We look forward to working with you and rising to this challenge together.

*Aloha,*



**Jon Gelman**

President & Chairman of the Board of Directors

ABOUT

# HAWAII MARINE ANIMAL RESPONSE

Established in 2016, Hawaii Marine Animal Response (HMAR) is the largest Hawaii-based marine animal response and conservation organization. HMAR is the field operations arm of Hawaii Marine Mammal Alliance, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. We are deeply committed to advancing marine protected species\* and ocean conservation in Hawaii.

Our primary goal is the reduction of human-caused threats to Hawaii's protected marine life and our ocean ecosystem. We work to achieve this goal by focusing on three primary objectives: (1) Educating our community to grow support for the animals and the ecosystem, (2) Mitigating threats to manage and recover protected species and the ocean, and (3) saving animals that need help.

We focus on marine species that are likely to be the most severely affected by human activity, such as endangered Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, seabirds, dolphins, and whales. Through our outreach, field response, interventions, rescue and stranding support activities, we work every day to move towards our shared vision of Hawaii's ocean ecosystem thriving in sustainable harmony between humans and marine animals.

\* Marine protected species are animals that are afforded special status and protections under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the Migratory Bird Treaties Act (MBTA) and other laws.



# OUR STORY

HMAR began in 2016 as a response and outreach organization that focused solely on the endangered Hawaiian monk seal. What started as a mission to educate beach-goers about one at-risk species and inspire environmental stewardship has evolved into a multi-faceted organization committed to comprehensive recovery of multiple protected species and the ocean ecosystem.

Over the years, we've expanded to include additional species and programs. In 2020, we engaged in conservation, education, response, rescue, stranding support, and habitat stewardship spanning six programs that positively impact over 35 different protected species.

Our efforts are focused primarily on Oahu, because Hawaii's most populated island is where many human-related impacts to protected marine animals and the ocean are concentrated. While the issues we address are complex, we are determined to tackle them on all fronts.

**“The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Pacific Islands Coastal Program (PICP) considers HMAR an integral partner for response and protection of marine species on Oahu and elsewhere in the main Hawaiian Islands.”**

**Sheldon Plentovich Ph.D.**  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Pacific Islands Coastal Program

# OUR MOTIVATION & VISION

Our oceans, the origin and foundation of life on our planet, are in trouble. No matter where we live, humans are deeply connected with the ocean through the air we breathe, the food we eat, the climate we live in, and the choices we make. In no other place in the country are the threats greater. Hawaii is known as the extinction capital of the United States, and impacts from human activities are the primary threats to our marine environment and the protected species that call it home. Loss of any of these keystone species would have cascading effects on the rest of the marine ecosystem, putting our entire ocean support system at risk.

We work towards an environment where humans, marine protected species, and the ocean ecosystem can sustainably coexist and support one another. All of HMAR's programs work synergistically to move us closer to being a community of stewards that will support healthy oceans through the decisions we make in our daily lives. For HMAR, we see it as our *kuleana* (responsibility) to take a proactive role in our community to care for the ocean and its inhabitants, just as we would our own *ohana* (family). By protecting the sea and its animals, we are protecting ourselves and our collective future.

HMAR is committed to establishing a legacy of facing complex challenges to our environment by providing comprehensive solutions when and where they're needed most.

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**Seiglina Meyer**

Active volunteer in Field Support & Outreach Program  
and Rescue & Stranding Response Program.

**“I’ve been with HMAR about a year and I joined HMAR because I had the desire to be a part of something bigger than myself. HMAR gives me that opportunity to give back to this beautiful island I call home.”**

# OUR GROWTH & EVOLUTION

## 2017

- Added HMAR operating name
- NOAA cooperative agreement for sea turtle program executed
- Start of sea turtle rescue & stranding response project
- Start of Rescue & Stranding Response Program
- Start of Education & Engagement Program
- Start of Marine Operations Program
- Maintained GuideStar platinum rating for a 2nd year

## 2019

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service seabird rescue permit received
- Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources (DLNR) seabird rescue permit received
- Additional DLNR agreements signed
- Start of Marine Debris Program
- NOAA Stranding Agreement finalized
- GuideStar platinum rating maintained for 4th consecutive year
- To date, over 200,000 people reached with outreach & education
- To date, over 12,000 field support activities conducted
- To date, over 700 rescues & interventions conducted

## 2021 Goals

- Receive federal and State of Hawaii seabird rehabilitation permits
- Launch the HMAR Care Center to provide medical and rehabilitation support for marine protected species
- Achieve a milestone of removing 2,000 underwater entanglement and hooking hazards
- Achieve a milestone of surveying or cleaning 200 acres of underwater habitat
- Achieve a milestone of 1,600 rescues & interventions conducted
- Achieve a milestone of 250,000 people reached with outreach & education
- Achieve a milestone of 20,000 field support activities conducted
- Take delivery of new & advanced marine support, rescue & stranding response vessel

## 2016

- Organization formed
- NOAA cooperative agreement for Hawaiian monk seal program executed
- Start of Hawaiian monk seal conservation and stranding support
- Start of Field Support & Outreach Program
- Start of Dispatch & Reporting Program
- Achieved GuideStar platinum rating

## 2018

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service cooperative agreement (multiple species) executed
- Start of sea turtle outreach & monitoring project
- Start of seabird outreach, monitoring & rescue project
- GuideStar platinum rating maintained for 3rd consecutive year
- To date, nearly 150,000 people reached with outreach & education
- To date, over 7,000 field support actions conducted
- To date, nearly 400 rescues and interventions conducted.

## 2020

- Federal and State of Hawaii sea turtle rehabilitation permits received
- Start of sea turtle and seabird nesting habitat monitoring projects
- To date, over 227,000 people reached with outreach & education
- GuideStar platinum rating maintained for 5th consecutive year
- To date, over 17,500 field support activities conducted
- To date, nearly 1,200 rescues & interventions conducted
- To date, nearly 1,000 in-water animal entanglement and hooking hazards removed, and about 100 acres of underwater habitat cleaned

# THE KEY THREATS WE ADDRESS



“Since HMAR started in 2016, they have demonstrated a strong ability to develop and run effective conservation programs that aid in the preservation of Hawaiian monk seals, marine turtles, seabirds and the nearshore marine ecosystem.”

**Brian Neilson**  
 Administrator  
 State of Hawaii, Department of Land & Natural Resources  
 Division of Aquatic Resources

## KEY THREATS



**Fishery interactions and marine debris** are some of the most significant threats to marine protected species and cause severe injury and death. Entanglements and ingestion caused by materials and marine debris left behind such as hooks, netting and fishing line are an ever-looming danger for our native marine life.

Key threats to the marine animals we work with are primarily anthropogenic, or resulting from human activities. Each of our programs addresses these problems in unique and focused ways.

Many of the threats to marine life are connected to one another, which is why HMAR's programs, and our approach to conservation, are integrated. The growing presence and impacts of these threats is driving the critical need for increased action in support of our marine environment.

### HOW HMAR PROGRAMS ADDRESS KEY THREATS

HMAR Program	Threats Addressed
Field Support & Outreach	
Rescue & Stranding Response	
Marine Debris	
Marine Operations	
Education & Engagement	
Dispatch & Reporting	



Other growing threats, such as **trauma, disease, and boat strikes**, are directly caused by human activities. Our programs aim to educate, respond, and provide comprehensive action that decreases the impact of these threats.



**Habitat loss due to climate change** and related impacts are population level threats to the marine animals we work with. Sea level rise threatens coastal nesting and pupping habitats, increasing storm surges destroy nests and critical coastal areas, and warming ocean temperatures threaten the health of the crucial coral reefs.

### THREATS

- Fishery Interactions
- Disease
- Boat Strikes
- Marine Debris
- Human Caused Trauma
- Habitat Loss

# WHERE WE ARE

HMAR's comprehensive approach to achieving truly impactful conservation outcomes is based on engaging devoted volunteers, interns, partners, and communities across six integrated programs.

## Field Support & Outreach Program

Our Field Support & Outreach Program conducts field response, monitoring, public outreach and data collection used in research and species management strategies. In 2020, we continued significant Hawaiian monk seal and sea turtle activities while expanding projects that positively impact vulnerable seabirds. To date, Field Support & Outreach team members have provided field support more than 17,500 times and have reached more than 227,000 people through face-to-face outreach.

## Rescue & Stranding Response Program

Our Rescue and Stranding Response Program helps to assess animals in need and disentangle, de-hook, transport, and release protected species while gathering data and facilitating scientific research to gain more insight into threats and improve species management plans. To date, our first responders have performed nearly 1,200 animal rescues and interventions.

## Marine Debris Program

Marine Debris Program team members dive the near-shore coastal waters of Oahu to preemptively remove hazardous threats before they cause harm to marine animals. To date, we've removed over 1,000 in-water entanglement and hooking hazards and cleaned about 100 acres of underwater habitat to make the nearshore ecosystem safer for sea turtles, Hawaiian monk seals and seabirds. We have also deployed recreational fishing debris collection bins at busy fishing locations to divert material such as fishing line and hooks before they enter the ocean to endanger marine life.

## Marine Operations Program

Our Marine Operations Program utilizes HMAR vessels, partner vessel resources, and highly trained crews to support on-water response, habitat surveys, rescue, and transportation of injured or stranded marine animals. Since this program began in 2017, we've conducted hundreds of hours of training and performed over 60 on-water missions. In 2021, we will take delivery of a new, purpose built marine support, rescue and stranding response vessel.

## Education & Engagement Program

Through our Education & Engagement Program, team members attend community events, classrooms, and local businesses to connect with community members of all ages and inspire stewardship for Hawaii's marine life and the ocean we share. To date, we have participated in over 200 school or community events and reached tens of thousands of people through our Education & Engagement program.

## Dispatch & Reporting Program

Our Dispatch & Reporting Program manages the hotlines that receive thousands of calls from the public every year and coordinates with government agencies to ensure that we can mount the most appropriate field action needed. This program also records and shares data obtained in the field with government research and species management partners to help conservation and recovery efforts. To date, the Dispatch & Reporting Program has received nearly 37,000 hotline calls regarding protected marine animals that may need help.





**Steve Depaoli**

Volunteer in our Marine Debris Program, Rescue & Stranding Program, Marine Operations Program, and Field Support & Outreach Program.

“HMAR is one of the best organizations if you want to work with and learn about the wonderful marine animals we are blessed with in the Hawaiian islands. Their well-structured training programs allow you to reach your full potential with their mission.”

## OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### TOTAL PEOPLE REACHED WITH OUTREACH & EDUCATION



### ANIMAL RESCUES & INTERVENTIONS



### INSTANCES OF FIELD SUPPORT ACTIVITY



### HOTLINE CALLS ANSWERED

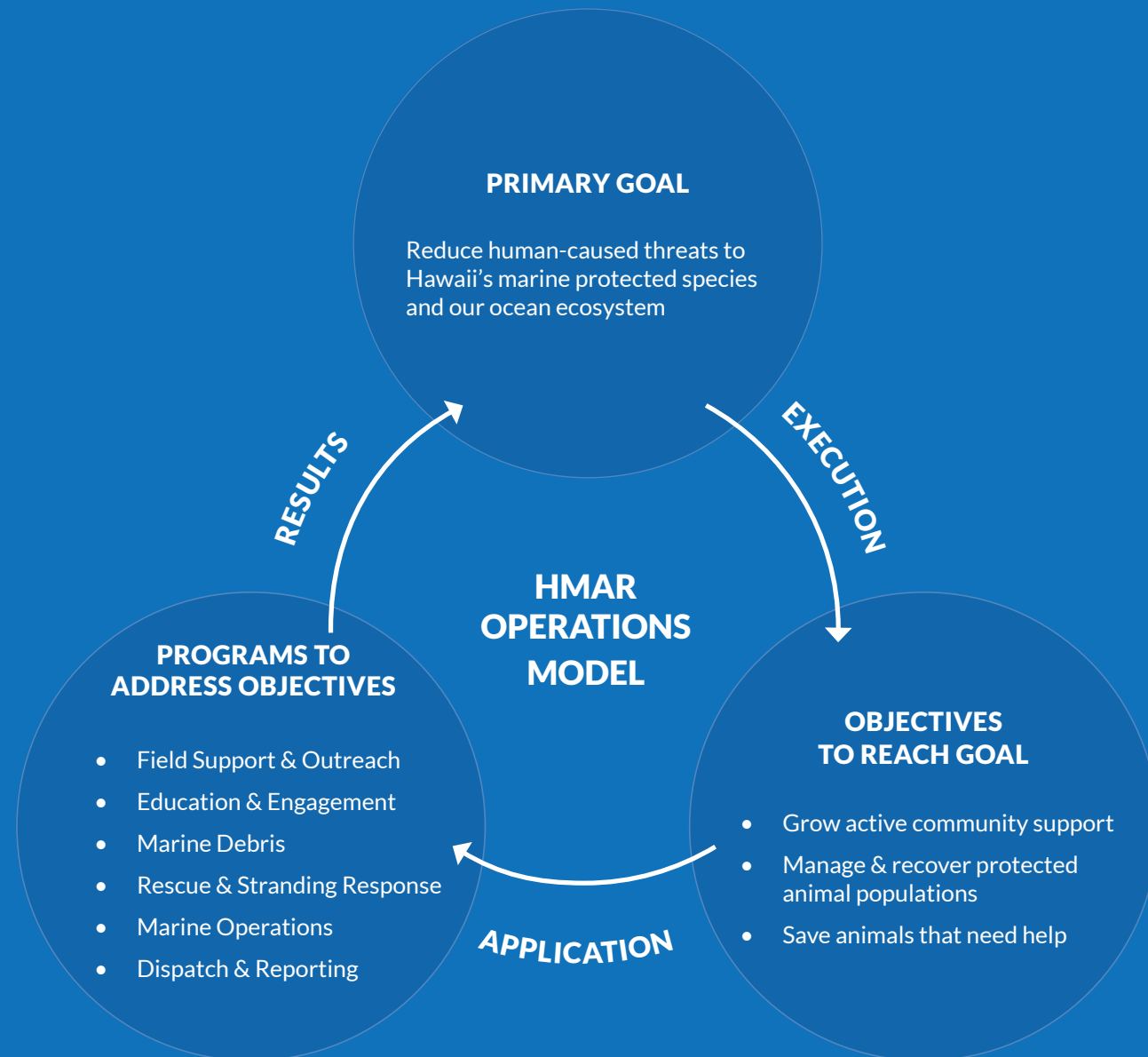


\* Some activities were affected by COVID-19 due to lockdowns, HMAR response protocols and CDC safety guidelines.



## THE HMAR OPERATIONS MODEL

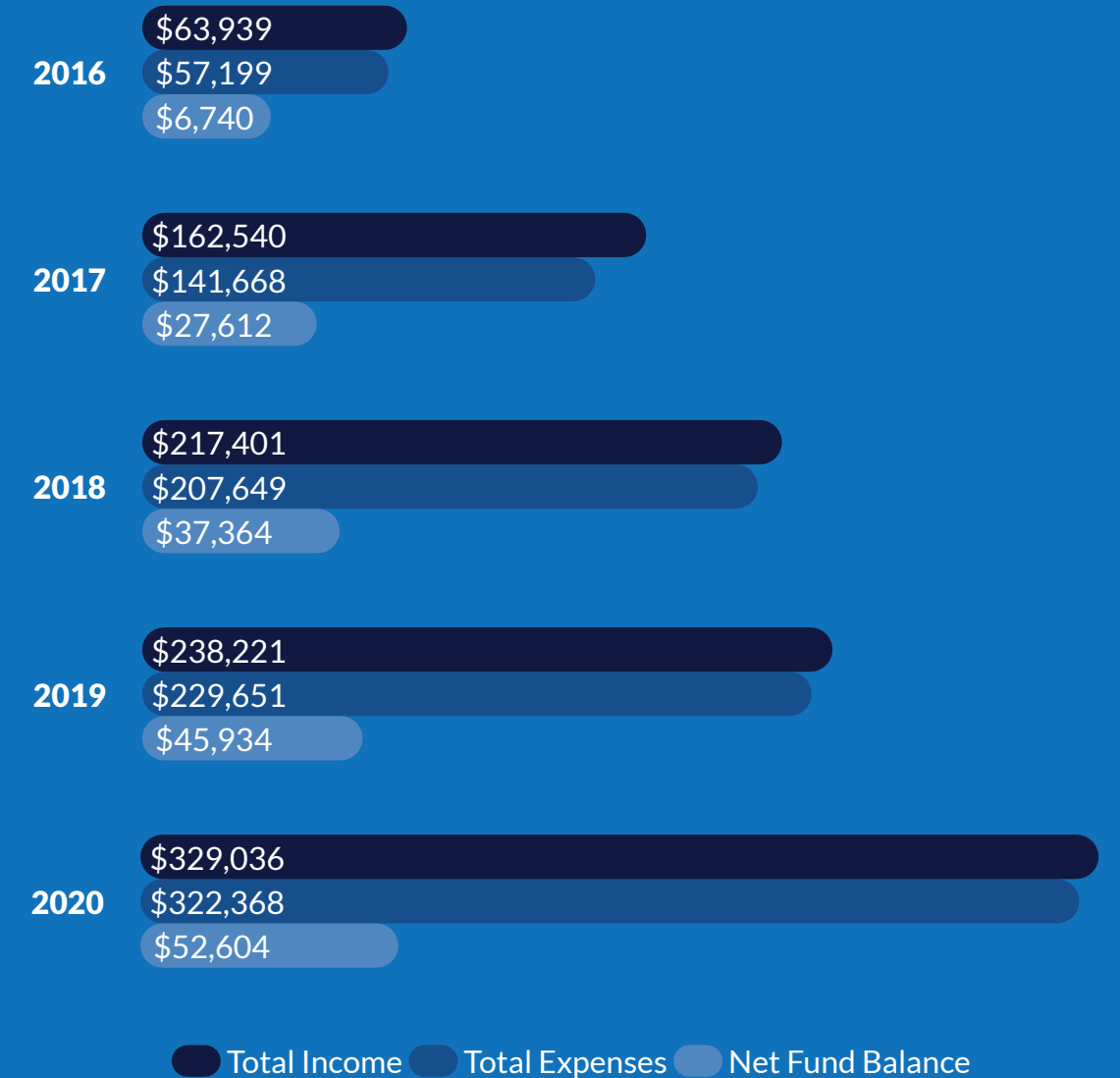
While HMAR is a non-profit organization, we strongly believe that we must be guided by a structured and rigorous application of principles used in successful for-profit businesses. This means strategically planning and tactically executing an operations model focused on specific goals, and objectives that will yield desired results. We also believe in carefully measuring activities and outcomes so that we can be sure we are making the most effective use of our financial and human resources. This operations model allows us to focus and refine our efforts and to generate significant results year after year.



## HMAR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & DISCIPLINE

HMAR management understands that to achieve success as a non-profit organization, we need to embody the financial management and fiduciary discipline applied by the most successful for-profit companies. We work hard to ensure that income from donations, grants, contracts and in-kind contributions are used efficiently to advance our mission and to honor the intent of our donors, funders, and partners.

We closely monitor and manage spending and debt to ensure HMAR funding is used to maximize our positive impacts on Hawaii's ocean ecosystem and its marine protected species.



# ON THE HORIZON



The coming year brings promises of hope and new opportunities to meet the challenges facing Hawaii's marine life and the ocean they call home. In 2021 we will strategically expand programmatic operations to enhance our ability to save animals and to engage across community and stakeholder landscapes, and expand stewardship and conservation of the marine environment. Thanks to you, we are continuing to grow and expand our ability to achieve positive impacts and honor the many people who contribute to HMAR's success. Here are some projects we are embarking on in 2021.

## Sea Turtle Nesting Habitat Surveys of Offshore Islets

Sea turtles living around the main Hawaiian islands face myriad threats and the impacts of climate change on nesting ecology, and habitat loss is of critical importance. Through a new project in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, HMAR will be conducting surveys of sea turtle nesting activity and nesting habitat on Oahu's offshore islets. Enhanced understanding of nesting ecology and available nesting habitat is essential for mitigating future loss of nesting habitat due to sea level rise, coastal development, and climate change.

## Seabird Nesting Habitat Surveys and Improvement Project

Several vulnerable seabird species face significant threats from invasive predators that decimate their ground-based nests, disturbance from human activities, and loss of suitable nesting habitat. In 2021 we will increase active monitoring and management at multiple seabird nesting colonies to reduce these threats at crucial seabird nesting sites.

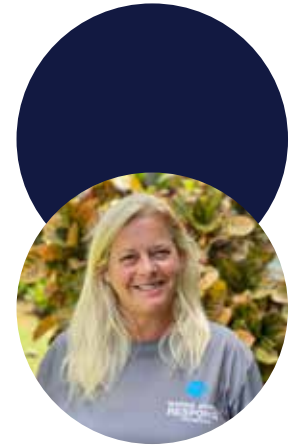
## Fishing Debris Bins Project

As part of our growing Marine Debris Program, in 2020 we partnered with federal and state agency partners to begin installing recreational fishing debris collection bins at popular fishing spots. This helps divert fishing gear that poses a significant danger to marine animals at the source. In 2021 we plan to dramatically increase the number of these collection bins to further prevent hooking and entanglement hazards from entering the ocean.

## Hawaii Marine Animal Response (HMAR) Care Center

HMAR is dedicated to providing comprehensive solutions to the complex environmental and conservation challenges of today's rapidly changing world. In 2021 we are embarking on an exciting new project to develop the HMAR Care Center.

Located on the island of Oahu, the HMAR Care Center will be an integrated ocean conservation and education center, with an on-site marine wildlife hospital and dedicated rescue and rehabilitation facilities. By combining our extensive field-based programs with HMAR Care Center programs for conservation medicine, rehabilitation, and research on Hawaii's marine protected species, the HMAR Care Center will also create extraordinary opportunities for hands-on training, education, and community engagement that fosters collaboration across stakeholder groups and cultivates generational stewardship of Hawaii's marine ecosystem and global ocean health.



**Robin Vinson**

Volunteer in our Education & Engagement Program and Field Support & Outreach Program.

**“It has been a privilege to be able to empower children through outreach, awareness, and education. It is rewarding to see children want to actively make a difference for this planet, both land and sea, through acts of sustainability and stewardship.”**

# LEADERSHIP & STAFF

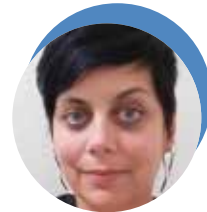
## STAFF



**Dr. Micah Brodsky**  
Director of Conservation  
Medicine & Director of  
Development



**Lauren Chamberlain**  
Marine Programs  
Lead



**Kristina Dauterman**  
Dispatch & Reporting  
Program Manager



**Jon Gelman**  
President



**Marisa Goin**  
Field Support &  
Outreach Program Lead



**Emily Greene**  
Education & Engagement  
Program Lead



**Nico Lopez**  
Field Operations  
Manager



**Todd Yamashita**  
Molokai Operations  
Manager

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Board  
Member



**Jon Gelman**  
Chairman of the Board  
of Directors



**Dr. Terry Norton**  
Board  
Member

## BOARD OF ADVISORS

Patrick Ching, Matt Kerr, Dr. Gregg Levine, Sarah Pifer, and Rachel Sprague Ph.D.

# WE WANT TO THANK YOU

We would not be where we are today without the generous and compassionate support from our amazing team of volunteers, corporate and private donors, and government partners. Your support makes everything we do possible. Together, we will continue to make significant positive impacts on Hawaii's protected marine animals, ocean ecosystem, and our collective future.

**“For over 3 years, HMAR has worked with NOAA under cooperative agreements to support protected marine animals, which for sea turtles, has included extensive field support to respond to stranded turtles. Our ability to collect scientific data to advance our knowledge of sea turtles is enhanced by our collaboration with HMAR and their efforts to strengthen sea turtle stranding response in Hawaii.”**

**Summer L. Martin, Ph.D.**

Leader, Marine Turtle Biology & Assessment Program  
Protected Species Division  
NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the wonderful network of collaborators, partners, and sponsors that we have had the good fortune to work with.



Cover photo courtesy of Larry Hogan

# HOW CAN YOU HELP?

2020 turned out to be a very productive year for HMAR, despite the myriad challenges shared by people and animals around the world.

We are beyond grateful for the dedication and extraordinary efforts of all of our volunteers and staff, and for the continued support of donors and funding partners that made it possible for HMAR to grow in 2020. The more we accomplish, the more aware we become of how much more needs to be done.

If you're ready to participate and make meaningful change possible through our organization, please consider supporting our education, response, rescue, conservation, or outreach programs, by doing any of the following.

## Donate

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Your generous donation of funds, supplies, equipment, vehicles, and in-kind services are the fuel that keep our organization running. HMAR is a volunteer-driven organization, and your support will go directly towards the preservation and stewardship of Hawaii's marine protected species and our ocean.

[Learn more at h-mar.org/get-involved](https://h-mar.org/get-involved)

## Volunteer

We're always looking for volunteers who are ready to make a lasting impact on the world around them and take action to save Hawaii's marine life and our shared ocean ecosystem.

[Learn more and apply to be a volunteer at h-mar.org/apply](https://h-mar.org/apply)

## Sponsor

By becoming a corporate sponsor your company can support our efforts to help sick and injured marine animals and protect the ocean that we share with them. Our sponsors directly support conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered marine life and improved ocean ecosystem health, while enjoying well deserved recognition for their commitment to leaving a healthier and safer world for future generations.

[Learn more at h-mar.org/sponsor-programs](https://h-mar.org/sponsor-programs)



Nick Keffer

Volunteer & intern, in our Marine Debris Program, Marine Operation Program, Field Support & Outreach Program, and our Rescue & Stranding Response Program

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“As part of the HMAR team, I love being immersed in nature and being able to bring people closer to such incredible species. *Mauka to makai*, Hawaii has so much to appreciate and conserve for later generations.”

Together, we can be  
a wave of change.



Learn more at [h-mar.org](http://h-mar.org)