

Officials investigate death of 2 monk seals

By Nina Wu
nwu@staradvertiser.com

Wildlife officials are investigating the deaths of two endangered Hawaiian monk seals on Molokai under suspicious circumstances.

Both of the seals — a 4-year-old male, RJ08, and 3-year-old female, RK92 — were found dead on April 27 on the west side of Molokai, according to officials.

Post-mortem exam results indicate that both seals died as a result of human-inflicted trauma, officials said, bringing the total number of suspicious deaths on Molokai since 2009 to at least seven.

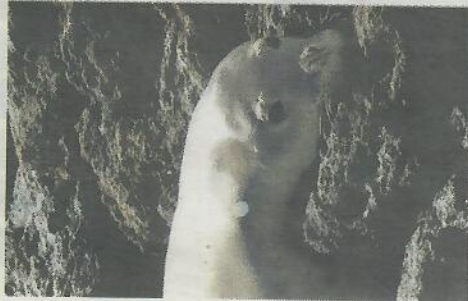
The exam found that both seals had no disease or other health concerns, and

they had been sighted the prior week in good health.

Both RK92 and RJ08 were born on Molokai, and known to frequent the west side.

"There is a strong, deep-rooted tradition of natural resources stewardship on Molokai, and we know that news of these deaths will be keenly felt by many on the island," said NOAA Fisheries in a statement posted online. "We are grateful to the community and our response network partners for assisting with recovery and transportation of the seals. We continue to be committed to supporting community-based conservation efforts on the island for these native monk seals."

On April 25, NOAA also re-



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Wildlife officials are investigating the suspicious circumstances surrounding the deaths of 3-year-old RK92, left, and 4-year-old RJ08, who were found dead on the west side of Molokai on April 27.

ported the death of R1N1, a 3-year-old male monk seal on Kauai's south shore. The cause of his death remains unknown.

Hawaiian monk seals are a

critically endangered species, with a population of only about 1,400 remaining in the wild, and killing one is considered both a federal and state crime.

Under the Endangered Species Act, it is illegal to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct

with any species listed, including Hawaiian monk seals. Under state law, intentionally or knowingly killing a monk seal is considered a felony.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement and Hawaii Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement are leading the investigation.

Anyone with information about the deaths is asked to contact NOAA OLE's hotline at (800) 853-1964 or the DOCARE hotline at 643-3567. Tips can also be submitted to the DLNRTip app.

All monk seal sightings and injuries can be reported to NOAA's marine wildlife hotline at (888) 256-9840.