

MONK SEALS- newspaper articles

1976-1981 G.H. BALAZS



**ORPHAN**—Maryanne Ho of the Sea Life Park training staff holds a baby monk seal found off French Frigate Shoals. —Star-Bulletin Photo by John Titchen.

# Baby Monk Seal Gets Tender Loving Care

His name is "Hanai" because that's what he is — adopted.

The latest marine foundling to make its way to Sea Life Park at Makapuu is a black, week-old Hawaiian monk seal, who was apparently abandoned by his mother shortly after birth on East Island, in the French Frigate Shoals.

The baby was flown to Honolulu Saturday after being transferred first to Tern Island, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a permanent station.

A spokeswoman said the male pup is "doing reasonably well," although officials are uncertain about his chances for survival. The orphan, weighing about 30 pounds, is being fed a formula consisting of vitamins, herring, whipping cream and other nutrients.

If it survives and becomes

healthy, it will be returned to its natural habitat, the spokeswoman said.

THE HAWAIIAN monk seal has been designated an endangered species since 1976. Gene Nitta, the marine mammal coordinator with the National Marine Fisheries Service, said there are only 1,000 to 1,500 monk seals existing, primarily around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, of which the French Frigate Shoals are a part.

Rob Shallenberger, supervisory wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said, "The Hawaiian monk seal is a critically endangered species and every animal is important to the population, which has declined in the last 20 years."

The pup was first seen last Wednesday by George Balazs.

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Wednesday, June 10, 1981 Honolulu Star-Bulletin

# Baby Monk Seal at Sea Life Park

Continued from Page One

who was conducting a sea turtle project on East Island for the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Sea Life Park spokeswoman said.

AFTER NOTIFYING Shallenberger, Balazs kept tabs on the baby to see if the mother would return. By Friday, there was still no sign of the mother and officials became concerned about its condition.

Shallenberger and Nitta checked surrounding islands to see if there was another mother monk seal who might accept the orphan, but without success. Shallenberger said that a mother whose own pup has died sometimes will accept another baby.

Monk seals are black at birth, then turn grey as they grow older, he said.

Hanai is the second Hawaiian monk seal to be kept at Sea Life Park this year. On Feb. 21, a 2-year-old seal was found along Oahu's North Shore, suffering from an eye infection. It was released two weeks later off Kure Atoll.

For years, there was only one monk seal in captivity. Friday, the seal, lived at the Waikiki Aquarium for 15 of its 16 years before dying in December 1978.



Advertiser photo by Ron Jeff

## *Sealed with love*

**"Hanai," which means adopted one in Hawaiian, seems content with a human mama, Barbara Kullijs, a marine researcher and volunteer at Sea Life Park. Hanai, probably a week old, was abandoned by his seal mother. Story on Page A-2.**

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A-2

# A seal of approval: 'Baby Hanai'

By Barbara Hastings  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Ask folks over at Sea Life Park about the infant Hawaiian monk seal they've adopted and you get strange answers.

Like this one: "It's a little person in a monk seal costume, a very insistent, pushy little thing," in the words of Kiana Wong, assistant curator.

Wong says this baby is bright and perceptive, almost human.

These folks at Sea Life Park are used to taking in and nursing ocean strays. But this infant, probably only a week old, has captured special places in their hearts. Babies do that.

So they've named the seal Hanai, or "the adopted one" in Hawaiian.

It's a boy, he's 30 pounds and jet black, but if he survives (and Wong says he's feisty enough, so it looks good) he'll turn gray as he matures.

Hanai came to the park Saturday after spending several days alone, abandoned by its mother on French Frigate Shoals' East Island.

He eats four times a day, feeding on an odd mixture of herring, whipping cream, vitamins and nutrients.

Saving Hanai was a cooperative effort of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after the pup was spotted last Wednesday.

Hawaiian monk seals are endangered, there



Advertisement photo by Ron Jett

"Hanai" at Sea Life Park.

aren't many of them around — estimates put them at 1,500 or fewer. So the stranded baby generated a lot of concern.

Hanai was first spotted by George Balazs, of the National Marine Fisheries Service, who's on East Island doing turtle research. He kept an eye out for the mother to return, but after two days of no mother and no food, the pup's survival chances were getting slim.

So Rob Shallenberger, Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, and Gene Nitta, of the National Marine Fisheries, went searching for a new mother.

Shallenberger explained that if a female monk seal has a youngster die, she sometimes will accept an orphaned pup to nurse as her own. Nitta and Shallenberger checked all the other islands where Hawaiian monk seal pups and mothers are found, but couldn't find a mama for Hanai.

So Hanai was taken to Tern Island and put on a plane for Sea Life Park.

Shallenberger says Hawaiian monk seals generally nurse for only about seven weeks. That will be the critical time for Hanai.

Just a little more than a month ago, Sea Life Park, with the help of the Coast Guard, let another Hawaiian monk seal go after nursing it back to health.

That seal, which beached outside a North Shore home in February, was suffering from a severe eye infection. The folks at Sea Life Park fixed up the juvenile seal, about a year and a half old, and the Coast Guard took it in a C-130 plane to Kure Island, where Hawaiian monk seals congregate.

## 'Hanai,' Orphan Monk Seal, Does Well at Sea Life Park

An orphaned baby Hawaiian monk seal is doing "reasonably well" after one week under the watchful eye of his adoptive parents, a team of veterinarians and trainers at Sea Life Park in Makapuu, a park spokesman said.

The seal "still seems to be hanging in there," although there appears to be no change in his condition, Linda Little said.

The baby, named Hanai, is being watched around the clock by a team of trainers and volunteers. He still is being fed a formula consisting of vitamins, herring and whipping cream, Little said.

The park has received many inquiries about Hanai's condition as well as offers of money to care for him, Little said. The park will not accept any of the donations, however, until officials are certain that the seal will live, she said.

LITTLE SAID IT is too early to

say what will happen to the male pup if he survives.

Hanai now is the only monk seal in captivity. Hawaiian monk seals, which number about 1,000 to 1,500, have been on the endangered species list since 1976.

Little said the 30-pound baby "loves being around humans" and likes to be carried.

"He is very affectionate," she said.

The two-week-old pup was found June 3 on East Island in French Frigate Shoals, where he apparently was abandoned by his mother shortly after birth.

He was brought to the park last Saturday from Tern Island, where he was cared for at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service station there.

# What to do about monk seals' plight?

By JIM BORG

Advertiser Staff Writer

People disagree on what to do about the dwindling population of monk seals in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

The National Marine Fisheries Service wants to designate certain parts of the leeward archipelago as a so-called critical habitat to restrict activity there.

Conservation groups approve.

Fishermen say they are not to blame. They suggest the drop in seal population over the last 20 years is due to sharks and a diet of poisoned fish.

They are supported by Susumu Ono, chairman of the state Board of Land and Natural Resources, who says there is no "convincing scientific evidence" that keeping fishermen and others away will help the seals.

These opinions were aired earlier this week at a public hearing on a draft environmental impact statement concerning the seal habitat.

About 60 people attended the hearing conducted by the fisheries service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The 10 northwestern Hawaiian Islands and atolls stretch from Nihoa, about 140 miles from Niihau, to Kure, some 1,700 miles farther northwest. They are remnants of once-large volcanoes.

Though there is no evidence that the monk seal population has ever been great, a 1958 count on six islands and atolls tallied 1,206. A broader search in 1978 found 502 seals.

In 1975, the Marine Mammal Commission declared the seal population "depleted." Last week the fisheries service established a Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team to develop a plan to boost the mammal's numbers.

While there has been no large-scale commercial fishing in the islands in recent years, the fishing industry believes there is an untapped potential for large lobster and bottomfish catches there. The habitat designation for the seals would hamper that.



"We have never hurt, killed or bothered the seals," said Alike Cooper, a Hilo fisherman. "The Hawaiians of the past lived with the environment . . . this philosophy still exists."

Cooper blamed the decline of the seal population on tiger sharks and on ciguatera toxin, a poison produced by microscopic marine life and ingested by the small fish the seals eat.

He suggested that alteration of the reefs at Kure, Midway and Tern Island at French Frigate Shoals has stirred up particles, increasing the plankton population and, accordingly, the toxin.

According to Doyle Gates, administrator of the NMFS Western Pacific Programs Office, examinations of seal carcasses on Laysan Island showed high levels of the toxin, but scientists couldn't conclude that's what killed the animals.

Louis Agard, a commercial fisherman representing the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council, said the causes of the seal population's decline are not well enough understood.

But he speculated that the reason researchers have seen so few young seals is that, like certain other species, they "go to sea for a few years and return."

Other groups agreed more studies are needed.

Greenpeace spokeswoman Sue DiFloure, blamed the seals' decline on "the rapaciousness of our state industries and local fishermen." She called for strong measures to protect the habitats.

And Heather MacMillan, speaking for David Raney, the Sierra Club's regional vice president, urged "too much, rather than too little" protection.

The impact statement proposes that beach areas, lagoon waters and ocean waters around Kure, Midway (except the military's Sand Island), Pearl and Hermes Reef, Lisianski Island, Laysan Island, French Frigate Shoals and Necker Island be designated a critical habitat for the seal.

Under three proposed options for restricting ocean waters, boats could approach no closer than a depth of 10 fathoms (60 feet), 20 fathoms, or a distance of three miles.

The designation would mean any activities proposed for the area would be evaluated by federal agencies.

Written comments on the statement can be submitted until May 14.

## **Fisherman Disputed**

Testimony presented by fisherman Aika Cooper at a recent public hearing, which was reported in the *Star-Bulletin* on May 5, stated that Hawaiian monk seals are endangered because of indiscriminate killing over the years by military personnel stationed in our Leeward Islands.

I wonder if Cooper can provide any evidence to support this serious accusation. Personally I doubt it.

Over the years I have made numerous visits to the small U.S. Coast Guard loran stations on French Frigate Shoals and Kure Atoll, as well as the naval facility on Midway. I have never heard of a monk seal being killed by military personnel, nor is there any mention of such an occurrence in the historical literature.

Unless his charge can be substantiated with facts, I feel that Cooper owes an apology to these men who have served their country with honor under isolated and difficult conditions.

*George H. Balazs*

Saturday, May 24, 1980 Honolulu Star-Bulletin A-9

# FORUM

the Readers' Page



# Laysan-Born Islander Recalls

By Harry Whitten  
Star-Bulletin Writer

Eric Laysan Schlemmer's middle name calls attention to the tiny island on which he was born March 22, 1903.

Laysan is a coral island, two square miles in size and 40 feet at its highest point, located 790 miles northwest of Honolulu.

Schlemmer's brother Otto and sister Otilie Unger, of Hilo, were also born on Laysan. They were the children of Maximilian Schlemmer, manager there for the North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Co., and his wife.

The company mined guano, a fertilizer rich in phosphates and ammonium compounds built up over the years from the excrement of millions of seabirds.

Schlemmer recently had occasion to tell three young biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service how they could dig for fresh water on the island when they go there this month on a five-month research trip.

SCHLEMMER MOST recently returned to Laysan in 1971 and dug a small well on a trip with Eugene Kridler, then refuge manager with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Schlemmer family lived on Laysan for 10 years, the only family there. There were the two parents,

seven children, 23 Japanese laborers to mine guano, and a Norwegian carpenter.

There was a modest frame house, a few small outbuildings, a shed to store the guano, and railroad tracks for carts on which guano was loaded and wheeled to the shoreline.

The ship arrived twice a year, bringing in rice, beans and other supplies and departing with the guano for Honolulu. The ship had to anchor offshore and guano was taken out to it in lighters. Much hand labor was involved.

Between ship arrivals, the people on Laysan were isolated. Mrs. Schlemmer gave birth to five children on the island, without medical help.

"BUT WE WEREN'T lonesome," Schlemmer says today. "We were used to the environment." His oldest sister Mary taught the younger children.

His father, usually called "Capt. Max" and sometimes referred to as the "king of Laysan Island," liked the solitude.

Max Schlemmer had been born in Alsace, Germany, in 1856 and died in Honolulu in 1935. He had been a captain of police and a marshal under the Hawaiian monarchy.

In 1902 and 1903 he asked the ship to bring in rabbits to supplement the limited food supply of the island residents. This move resulted in

strong criticism from biologists because in 20 years' time the rabbits multiplied so fast that they devastated the island vegetation.

The Schlemmers left Laysan in 1907 after the supply of guano had been pretty well mined out.

TODAY SCHLEMMER says the mistake was in leaving too hastily. "We kept the rabbits under control, but they went wild and multiplied after the island was turned into a bird refuge," he says.

If someone had remained on Laysan, the rabbits would have been kept under control, he says.

After guano mining ceased, Japanese feather hunters arrived and killed hundreds of thousands of seabirds in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, including an estimated 300,000 on Laysan during a six-month period in 1909.

To stop the slaughter, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 put the islands in the Hawaiian Islands Bird Reservation, later renamed the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

In June 1915 Max Schlemmer sailed for Laysan aboard the one-masted sloop Helene, accompanied by his son Eric, then 12 years old, and a young Norwegian, Harold Brandt. Max wanted to be named refuge warden and planned cleanup work around the abandoned buildings.

They reached Laysan after a rough trip. On Sept. 28 their plans were changed when a lifeboat arrived with the captain and crew of the schooner O.M. Kellogg, which had been shipwrecked the night of Sept. 25 on Maro Reef, a rock outcropping east of Laysan.



**BIRTHPLACE**—This is the house on Laysan Island where Eric Laysan Schlemmer was born in 1903.

# Its 'Mining' Days

SUPPLIES WERE insufficient for everybody, so Capt. Max offered the Helene to the Kellogg's crew, so they could sail to Midway. The Schlemmer party expected to be picked up in November by the Coast Guard cutter Thetis.

But the Thetis didn't arrive. The party was running short of food as they scanned the ocean, day after day, looking for rescue, which came Dec. 2 when the Navy collier Nereus came and took them off.

A young electrician on the Nereus was Harry P. Field, who later became vice president of Hawaiian Electric Co., the same company for which Eric Schlemmer worked 43 years before retiring as a superintendent of maintenance in 1967.

Schlemmer returned again to Laysan in 1923 when he served six months as an assistant to the ornithologist Alexander Wetmore on the Tanager expedition for the Smithsonian Institution.

The Tanager expedition, among other things, exterminated the last of the rabbits; the U.S. Biological Survey had sent out previous parties to kill rabbits.

**BUT BEFORE** their extermination, the rabbits had eaten up so much vegetation that three native birds, the Laysan rail, Laysan millerbird and Laysan apapane became extinct.

Only three Laysan honeycreepers

remained and they apparently disappeared in a big windstorm during the Tanager expedition.

Of the native birds, only the Laysan duck (or teal) and the Laysan finch survived. The Laysan duck almost became extinct but its population has increased to about 300, while there are an estimated 8,000 Laysan finch now.

The vegetation on Laysan made a good comeback after the rabbits were exterminated although three plant species became extinct.

And there is a breeding population of more than a million seabirds such as sooty terns, Laysan and black-footed albatrosses, and Bonin Island petrels.



Eric Laysan Schlemmer

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# Pair Going Off to

By Harry Whitten  
Star-Bulletin Writer

During the 10 years of their married life, Brian and Pattie Johnson have spent much of their time on isolated islands with no companions except seals and birds.

"It's the kind of experience that will either make you or break you," they say in reporting that the experience has strengthened their marriage.

They were to leave today on the fourth year of their study of the Hawaiian monk seal, which has been on the endangered species list since 1976. It is one of only two native mammals in Hawaii, the other is the Hawaiian bat.

They did similar studies in 1974-76 on the harbor seal in the Pribilof Islands, Tugidak Island near Kodiak, and Bristol Bay, Alaska.

After the cold of Alaska they sought warmer climates, and in 1977 started the monk seal studies, mostly on Laysan Island, in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, but sometimes on Kure, Midway and Lisianski Islands.

This season's trip will be the first to French Frigate Shoals, which has a major seal breeding population that has remained stable. On Monday they will go to Laysan, where they will stay until the end of August.

The Johnsons are under contract with the Marine Mammal Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service to learn as much as they can about the seals and to find ways to reverse the population decline.

AT ONE TIME the Hawaiians hunted the seals in the main Hawaiian Islands. Then in the 19th century seal hunters killed almost the entire population of the slow-moving animal that hadn't previously had to worry about land-based predators.

For 20 years no seals were seen on Laysan. But the population recovered.

ed, although probably not to its previous level.

Now another decline has resulted in a population drop of 50 percent in the last 20 years. The estimated world population now is about 1,000.



Brian and Pattie Johnson

The Johnsons will try to find out why the population is declining. There are several possible reasons, such as shark attacks, human disruption, and fish toxin, of the sort found occasionally in Hawaii. The toxin is believed responsible for the deaths of 25 out of the 300 seals on Laysan last year.

The Johnsons will study the life history of the monk seal, whether a female has her single pup every year or every other year, what percentage of the pups survive, the age of sexual maturity, how the animals interact with each other, how the mothers care for the pups.

They especially want to find out what happens when the pup is weaned, how it learns to avoid sharks, an ever-present danger.

THE JOHNSONS name the individual seals and have named 350 so far, in alphabetical order — Alvin, Bailey, etc. They are starting to run out of names.

The young seals look pretty much alike, so the Johnsons squirt an ultra-blue bleach on the seal's back, giving name and number. The

# Study Monk Seals

bleach disappears, after two years, when the seals molt, but by then the individuals have recognizable markings that permit identification, such as scars from shark attacks or coral cuts.

"It's a rewarding experience, year by year, to watch the seals grow," the Johnsons say.

One thing the Johnsons don't do is tag or kill the animals for study. They try to learn about them with as little disturbance as possible.

The monk seal grows to a length of 7 1/2 feet, lives more than 30 years, may reach a weight of 650 pounds, but 400 pounds is more normal. Pups weigh 40 pounds at birth but in five or six weeks will weigh 160 pounds, the result of the mother's rich milk.

The seals appear lethargic on land, but this is because quick activity causes overheating, the Johnsons say. They are said to be one of only two tropical seals in the world.

FROM PAST experience, the

Johnsons have learned that it is better to take with them all the supplies they need for a six-month period, including food and water.

On Laysan, however, they welcome the once-a-month visits by the research vessel Townsend Cromwell, which brings them mail and gives them an opportunity to take showers.

They also get invited aboard Skip Nafel's fishing vessel, the Easy Rider, for ice cream when it is in the vicinity.

They use two tents. One for sleeping and the other for daytime use. The latter has a wooden frame and screening to keep out the flies.

"The flies are so many on Laysan they would drive us batty if we couldn't escape them," they say.

LAYSAN IS NOT a quiet island, because the thousands of birds such as terns, shearwaters and albatrosses are moaning, screeching or whistling all the time.



A protesting Hawaiian monk seal

## Move Launched to Save Hawaiian Monk Seals

By Nadine W. Scott  
Star-Bulletin Writer

A dramatic decline in the population of Hawaiian monk seals indicates the great beasts could disappear.

But a move to place the seal on the endangered list may offer hope for survival of the species.

Research counts since December 1975 "clearly indicate the Hawaiian monk seal is presently in danger of extinction and supports a proposed endangered status," the recommendation said.

It was made by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

PALMER SEKORA, refuge manager for the Hawaiian Islands and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge, said the "endangered species" designation will "call attention to the plight of the monk seal and give us money and manpower to find out what's going on."

Sekora said the most comprehensive recent survey of the seal population was made in March and April. It put the number of the animals at 565.

But taking a seal census has problems. "We don't know how many are out to sea, and it's difficult to get into certain areas," he said.

"Because of all the variables, I estimate the population at 1,000, plus or minus 500. That's pretty gross, isn't it? But we just don't know how many there are."

He said he is puzzled because there appears to be a sizable increase in the seal population at French Frigate Shoals while at the

same time there is a "very significant decrease" in the number of seals at Pearl and Hermes Reef, Midway and Kure Atoll.

"ON MIDWAY and Kure, we assume the decline is because of human activity," he said. "But that does not explain the substantial decrease in the Pearl and Hermes area where there are no people."

Federal officials last year estimated the Hawaiian seal population at 1,000.

The ancient Hawaiians left the seal alone. They called it "Ilio-holo-i-kua," which translates roughly as "the dog that runs in the tough element."

The specie managed the "tough element" until Europeans arrived in the Islands and slaughtered the animals for blubber.

A report in *The Polynesian* in 1859 reported the vessel *Gambia* went on a 103-day voyage to the northwestern islands and returned with 240 barrels of seal oil.

By 1900, the animals were near extinction.

In more recent years, they have taken themselves where people seldom go — to the desolate leeward islands of Hawaii that became a federal wildlife refuge. They breed on the islands from Nihoa to Pearl and Hermes Reef.

THERE ARE ONLY three species of monk seals in the world. The Caribbean specie is nearly extinct and the Mediterranean specie population has declined.

A few Hawaiian seals are at the Waikiki Aquarium.

## Abandoned monk seal dies at park

Hanai, the baby Hawaiian monk seal at Sea Life Park, is dead.

The pup, which was brought to the park a couple weeks ago after being abandoned by its mother near East Island in French Frigate Shoals, had been doing well. But in the past week he started losing weight and died over the weekend.

Hawaiian monk seals are an endangered species, and not much is known about how to care for the babies. Hanai was being fed a mixture of whipping cream, fish, vitamins and nutrients. When he started losing weight, more vitamins were added to his feed, but apparently Hanai's couldn't absorb what he needed.

A-4 Tuesday, June 23, 1981 HONOLULU ADVERTISER ★★

## Sea Life Park's Orphan Seal Dies Over Weekend

The orphaned Hawaiian monk seal pup under the care of trainers and veterinarians at Sea Life Park since June 6 died during the weekend, a park spokeswoman said.

The cause of the pup's death is not known, but an autopsy will be performed later this week, the spokeswoman said.

The male pup, named Hanai, "appeared healthy" but began losing weight last week, she said.

Trainers added more vitamins to the pup's formula, but it appears that he could not absorb the necessary nutrients to keep him alive, she said.

Gene Nitta, the marine mammal coordinator with the National Marine Fisheries Service, said the success rate for saving abandoned seals is about 90 percent for California sea lions and harbor seals. But there is little data on how to treat Hawaiian monk seals because very few of the abandoned animals have been captured, he said.

"We learned a lot from this (seal)," Nitta said.

He said much of a pup's survival depended upon its condition when it is found. Judging from external examinations, Hanai "looked okay," he said.

Nitta said the pup would have died anyway if he was not brought into captivity.

The pup was found June 3 on East Island in the French Frigate Shoals, apparently abandoned by his mother after birth.

A-2 Honolulu Star-Bulletin Monday, June 22, 1981

## **Fisherman Disputed**

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*George H. Balazs*

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