

The Honu Hospital



Above left, animal care manager Taylor Prostor treats a Hawaiian green sea turtle, which had become entangled in fishing line, at the new Hawai'i Marine Animal Response Care Center, O'ahu's first honu ER. Once rehabilitated, the turtles are released near the spot where they were found—in this case, Ala Moana Beach Park (above right)—to much rejoicing and Instagramming.

The rain didn't stop them, not these volunteers, not today. On a gloomy morning at Ala Moana Beach, OA191, a Hawaiian green sea turtle, or honu, is carried to the water and released where it was found three weeks before, entangled in fishing line, its left fore flipper injured.

The turtle had been rescued by Hawai'i Marine Animal Response, the state's largest marine conservation field response rescue and outreach organization. These are the folks you call when you find a distressed sea turtle or seabird, and they're the ones shooing curious beachgoers away from basking monk seals.

"We're busy every day of the year," says HMAR founder and president Jon Gelman. Its nine staffers and legions of volunteers help more than two hundred turtles a year, some requiring medical care. A year ago, HMAR opened O'ahu's first emergency care and rehabilitation center for sea turtles near Makapu'u. Its six holding tanks include a huge, ten-thousand-gallon tank for larger turtles and areas for treatments like laser and

wound therapy, medical massage and surgery. Gelman, who started HMAR about ten years ago after retiring from a career in telecommunications, points to a juvenile turtle in one of the 1,500-gallon tanks. It got tangled in discarded fishing line—a common threat—and its left fore flipper must be amputated. The surgery will be done onsite—the first surgery at the new HMAR Care Center—using a state-of-the-art anesthesia device.

When it started in 2016, HMAR focused on Hawaiian monk seals, one of the most endangered seals in the world; on average, Gelman says, they aided three thousand seals annually. A year later, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration asked if it could help sea turtles. A year later, seabirds. "We follow the need," says Gelman, who has never taken a paycheck. "We go where our resources and capabilities can help the most." HMAR often gets mistaken for a state or federal agency; most aren't aware that it's a private nonprofit relying on grants, donations and volunteers. "We do what

we can, we make an impact," Gelman says, "but nobody knows who we are."

HMAR is exploring the possibility of setting up an outdoor space for seabirds that become disoriented by artificial light and fall to the ground due to exhaustion or injury. ("Fallout" happens most often between September and December, when young birds are just leaving their nests.) These birds—mostly wedge-tailed shearwaters, or 'ua'u kani—typically don't need extensive medical care, just a safe place to rest. Last year alone, HMAR conducted 182 seabird interventions, 71 percent of which were related to fallout.

"Nobody does what we do at the volume we do it," Gelman says. "And we're always asking ourselves, 'How can we do what we do better and better every year?'"

If you see a marine animal in distress, call HMAR's hotline at (888) 256-9840.

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ISLAND INTELLIGENCE

22 /
The Honu Hospital

STORY BY CATHERINE TOTH FOX
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELYSE BUTLER

25 /
Power and Prestige

STORY BY PETER VON BUOL

26 /
Where the Birds Are

STORY BY CONNER GORRY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW RICHARD HARA

29 /
Room to Flow

STORY BY SARAH BURCHARD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LILA LEE

30 /
Growth Mindset

STORY BY SARA STOVER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW RICHARD HARA

32 /
A Space in the Sun

STORY BY MARTHA CHENG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT MALLAMS

DEPARTMENTS & FEATURES

38 /
For the Retaking
Native Hawaiian
photographers are
standing on the other
end of the lens

STORY BY LESA GRIFFITH

48 /
Artist of the Portrait
For Dana Edmunds, a
great photo begins in the
heart before it reaches
the eye

STORY BY CATHARINE LO GRIFFIN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA EDMUNDS

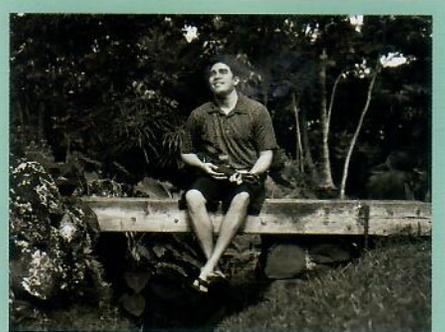
62 /
Photographic Memories
For almost thirty
years, *Hana Hou!*
photographers have
documented Hawai'i's
subtlety and grandeur

86 /
A Moment Noticed
Six *Hana Hou!* veterans
on their personal favorites

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW RICHARD
HARA, ELYSE BUTLER, LINNY MORRIS,
MONTE COSTA, DAVID LIITTSCHWAGER AND
PF BENTLEY

98 /
Treasured Images
Since the advent of the
camera, Hawai'i has been
one of the world's most
photographed places

STORY BY STU DAWRS



108 /
**Events Calendar &
Island by Island**

143 /
**Hawaiian Airlines
Information**

160 /
PAU HANA
Natural Selections

STORY BY MICHAEL SHAPIRO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAYLOR NIIMOTO