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Baby monk seal probably killed by a boat

**Of four monk seals born on
Kauai since 1989, three now
have been found dead**

By Anthony Sommer
Star-Bulletin



BARKING SANDS, Kauai -- The baby monk seal born on the Fourth of July on a beach at the Navy's Pacific Missile Range Facility was killed only a few miles away on Labor Day weekend, state aquatics officials learned recently.

A Kauai couple kayaking along the coast last September found the jet-black 2-month-old pup floating dead in the surf about a half mile north of Nohili Point. They said she was bleeding from the nose and mouth with one eye badly damaged.

The kayakers saw an inflatable boat circling nearby as though the people aboard it were looking for something in the water and believe the boat may have hit the seal.

"Young seals have to learn survival skills," said marine biologist Don Heacock of the State Aquatics Division's Kauai office. "An adult monk seal can outswim and outfight any tiger shark in the ocean but a young seal will just stop and look at it. Same thing with a boat. They don't know what it is."



By Nick Galante, Special to the Star-Bulletin
"Barkie," right, is tended to by her mother on the beach at the south end of the main runway at Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai. Born on the Fourth of July, she was found dead in the surf a few miles away on Labor Day weekend.

Of only four monk seals born on Kauai since 1989, three now have been found dead, Heacock said.

One was found dead off Niihau, and another apparently drowned after swallowing an ulua hook in Hanamaulu Bay on Kauai.

Heacock said the good news is that two pregnant female monk seals without tags and with markings never before recorded were spotted on Kauai this week.

Heacock said he recorded their scars and three trained volunteer monk seal watchers who work with him will be checking for them on the island's beaches. A seal's scars are unique and once recorded help biologists to track its movements.

The two seals probably are from Niihau or Lehua where seals aren't tagged, Heacock said. If they migrated from the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, they already would have been tagged by biologists.

Heacock still is steaming about not finding out about the death of the seal at Barking Sands until three months after it occurred. The problem was a missed communication and no one followed up; as a result, the seal's body never was recovered and autopsied, he said.

"Obviously, if someone spots a seal that's been entangled in marine debris or wounded, that's a big emergency. But finding a dead seal is also a big emergency.

"Any time an endangered species is found dead, it's important to learn the cause of death," Heacock said.

Heacock said Kauai Police Department dispatchers have the pager numbers for himself and his volunteers and anyone spotting a dead or injured seal or people harassing a seal

on Kauai should call the police, he said.

The birth of the pup at Barking Sands, the first ever on the base since it was established in World War II, was a major event on Kauai last summer, and Heacock and the Navy conspired to keep the location secret . A large area of the beach was cordoned off and people were kept at least 100 feet away.

Typically, monk seals will not give birth anywhere near humans, Heacock said. For reasons not understood, the air traffic on the base's main runway adjacent to their beach did not seem to bother the seals.

Bob Inouye, a missile range employee, kept watch on the seal daily. National Marine Fisheries biologists who came over to tag her on Aug. 24 decided to call her "Barkie," Inouye said.

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