

HAWAI'I MARINE MAMMAL CONSORTIUM

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HMMC UPDATE - DECEMBER 2003

A Quick Summary of HMMC Projects and News Since April 2003



Meet the newest member of the HMMC family: Mele Hathaway Rickards born October 28, 2003 to proud parents Susan and Billy Rickards.

COMPLETION OF WINTER 2003 RESEARCH CONTRACT

Our attention was occupied well into the summer by data analysis from the winter 2003 season and the multi-year report on shore-based scans that was due to the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) under the 2003 research contract. In August we submitted to DLNR a draft manuscript entitled "Trends in Relative Distribution, Abundance and Population Composition of Humpback Whales, *Megaptera novaeangliae* in Kawaihae Bay, Island of Hawai'i 1988-2003". The report is on the web at: http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/research/project_list.html. We plan to edit (shorten) it for submission for publication in the scientific journal *Pacific Science* some time in 2004.

HMMC INCORPORATED AS NON-PROFIT IN HAWAI'I

As you may know, the HMMC has been pondering and discussing incorporation as a non-profit for more than a year, but in July we polled our members for approval, and decided to go for it. On behalf of the HMMC, and with input from other members, Susan Rickards submitted the application to the State of Hawai'i in September, and received notification that HMMC was officially incorporated in Hawai'i as of 21 October 2003. We are putting the finishing touches on the 9-page application for the second phase of the process, federal recognition of tax exemption under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. When approved, our tax-exempt, non-profit status will be retroactive to 21 October 2003. The initial board members and officers of the HMMC will be: President - Chris Gabriele, Vice-President - Adam Frankel, Secretary - Suzanne Yin, Treasurer - Susan Rickards. We envision that the founding members of the HMMC (and possibly others) will become actively involved in HMMC projects and become board members in the future, but will participate as scientific advisors in the meantime. We will do our best to keep everyone informed about the HMMC, but please let us know if you would like information or to provide input on future HMMC operations. Check our website (www.hmmc.org) for a listing of our founding members.

SUMMER FIELD WORK Although the HMMC does not currently have any summer field projects, we were happy to accommodate two requests for use of the *Malolo* in June and July. Susan Rickards worked onboard the *Malolo* with Jan Östman-Lind (Kula Nai'a Foundation) and with Kim Andrews (Whit Au's graduate student at the University of Hawai'i) on several spinner dolphin photo-ID and biopsy sampling surveys. We have determined that by charging a small fee for the use of the boat (\$10 per hour) for non-HMMC projects, we can maintain a fund to pay for boat maintenance and repair. Thanks again to Joe Mobley for making the *Malolo* available, and to Honda Motor Corporation of America for giving HMMC such a good deal on a new engine last winter! Future requests for the use of any HMMC equipment should be directed to Susan Rickards.



Malolo narrowly escaped abduction by aliens this summer at the Rickards' happy home in Kamuela.

WINTER 2004 FIELD PLANS The best news is that we have a great crew of returning volunteers standing by for the winter research, including: Paul Berry, Todd Buczyna, Emily Herb, L.J. Irwin-Smith, Kim New, Billy Rickards, Holly Sargeant-Green and Greg Timmel. The main HMMC field staff this winter will be Suzanne Yin, Chris Gabriele, and Adam Frankel, with Susan Rickards assisting with field logistics and data processing, 'one-handed' while caring for baby Mele.

Boat-based Studies of Individual Whales In January - March 2004, again with funding from the DLNR and the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, the HMMC will be participating in "SPLASH". SPLASH, which stands for "Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance and Status of Humpbacks" is an international collaborative study aimed at a greatly improved understanding of humpback whales in the North Pacific. Research groups in Mexico, Japan, the Philippines and the main Hawaiian Islands will be conducting photographic identification and biopsy sampling surveys simultaneous with the HMMC's efforts off West Hawai'i in winter 2004 and 2005. In summer 2004 and 2005, SPLASH sampling will occur in humpback whale feeding areas along the Pacific Rim in Russia, the Aleutian Islands, the Bering Sea, coastal and offshore Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California. We are very glad to participate in order to contribute to SPLASH findings about the migratory destinations and genetic structure of North Pacific humpbacks and also grateful that SPLASH provides HMMC a golden opportunity to jump-start the resumption of boat-based humpback whale research in West Hawai'i.



Research vessel Malolo as viewed from the shore station in March 2003.

Shore- Based Scans Continue

We will also be continuing our four weekly scan samples from Old Ruins, consistent with the previous three years of shore-based observations. With the changes in methodology that we initiated in 2003, we believe our data collection process in 2004 will be more streamlined, and still allow us to document the seasonal distribution of humpback whales in Kawaihae Bay. We are optimistic that our work will continue to build on our foundation of information about the importance of West Hawai'i waters to the winter lives of North Pacific humpbacks.

No Acoustic Tracking of Singing Whales This Winter

Last winter it was great to be able to hear whale song from shore again, but we do not plan to collect acoustic data with the sonobuoys we built and installed last year, so that we can focus on shore- and vessel-based observations. However, now that we have the sonobuoy equipment and have identified the first round of technical issues, we will be looking for funding to resume studies on the interactions of singing males with other whales in winter 2005 and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We thank all our past, present and future supporters and friends for their important part in the HMMC's accomplishments so far!