

# Oahu, 2023

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Hawaiian Monk Seal, *Neomonachus schauinslandi*

In the few days prior to Christmas last year, I joined Jon Hall and his family for a private boat charter looking for some interesting cetaceans off of the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian islands. I was there for four days, from the 17th of December until the 21st, with the boat going out on the 19th. I was able to stay with some cousins of mine who live in Kaaawa on the East coast of the island, which helped make things much more affordable. I spent much of the trip driving around with them and seeing the island, as there is only so much mammalwatching to be done on the island. One place we stopped was [Pu'u O Mahuka Heiau State Historic Site](#), which my cousin Richard mentioned was a good spot to watch the ocean for whales, but I didn't see any.



Rough-toothed Dolphins, *Steno bredanensis*

The boat, which was led by Wild Side Hawaii, left at about sunrise and quickly ran into just what we were looking for - a pod of **Rough-toothed Dolphins** (*Steno bredanensis*). After watching them swim back and forth for a while around the boat, they hung around long enough for us to jump in the water with them and watch as they swam by. Later, we ran into another pod of dolphins, this one a mixture of both the Rough-tootheds and **Pantropical Spotted Dolphins** (*Stenella attenuata*). We continued to watch these dolphins as they swam and jumped in front of a rainbow, before once again joining them very close by in the water - a pretty incredible experience in all.



Rainbow (Left) + Dolphins (Right)

Later, after a few hours of boating around, we briefly waited around to see if a faraway spout from a **Humpback Whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) would emerge into an animal, but no such luck. The dolphins would serve to be the only cetaceans seen that day.



Laysan's Albatross

After arriving back at the dock, I drove out to Ka'ena Point State Park to look for the **Hawaiian Monk Seals** (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*) that often reside there. I hiked up the Southern trail to the point, as there is one that goes along either coast leading to the tip of the island. I reached the end where the sign for the seals is at around 3pm, but alas, there were no seals in sight. I waited around for a little while to see if one would turn up, but luck was not on my sign, so I walked back defeated, with no seals anywhere on the coastal beaches along the trail either.



Well-hidden Monk Seal

Thankfully, however, I had another day left before leaving the island so I was able to return to the point the following day and try for the seals again. I took the North coast trail this time, which did seem to have many more sandy beaches for the seals to potentially haul out on along the way, but I didn't see any there. By the time I once again reached the seal sign I had already put all of the plans for a return trip to the island square in my head, but then - thankfully - I noticed a rock out in one of the enclosed pools start to move. Finally, to my delight, a seal head popped up, and I breathed an incredible sigh of relief.



Seal with Shark bite on its side - Possibly the same one seen by Jon Hall four days earlier

I didn't see any other mammals on my trip, but did briefly ask my cousins about the endemic **Hawaiian Hoary Bat** (*Aeorestes semotus*), and they said they hadn't seen it on O'ahu in their thirty years of living there. They did say, however, that they had some living in their house when they lived on Kauai, and they seem to fly around fairly regularly on the Big Island as well.

Thanks to Wild Side Hawaii for the very knowledgeable crew and the great cetaceans, and thanks too to Jon Hall for organizing the trip and making it possible. It made for a very nice way to spend a few days, and brought in some very cool mammals along the way.

Species List:

- Rough-toothed Dolphin** (*Steno bredanensis*)
- Pantropical Spotted Dolphin** (*Stenella attenuata*)
- Hawaiian Monk Seal** (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*)

## Other Selected Pictures:

### Landscapes:









Birds:









