

Endangered Hawaiian hoary bat rescued, rehabilitated

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Two hours passed before the little endangered Hawaiian hoary bat decided it was time to leave. The young female bat appeared to be taking her time. She hung seemingly content from a low branch, waking occasionally and once taking a bite of mealworm.

When the rare nocturnal creature finally flew off a branch at Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park, she swooped between the heads of her caretakers and turned to fly south. For three days, Ann and Norm Goody of the Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary in Kailua-Kona took care of her.



"Off she went. It was just great, it was perfect," Ann Goody recalled. "There was a lot of waiting before she flew off." The release group arrived at the park around 5:30 p.m. Friday and the bat flew away at about 7:21 p.m.

The successful rescue and rehabilitation illustrates the power of community working together to protect the environment. "It is through the cooperation of all agencies and the education of our local residents that this wonderful creature is going back to the wild," said Ann Goody, sanctuary curator.

The Goodys received a call about the bat from the Hawaii Island Humane Society in Kona Wednesday afternoon. A worker at a nearby wastewater treatment plant found the bat on a car. It seemed to have fallen from a low tree and was not moving, said Ann Goody.

Norm Goody, who rushed over to identify and pick up the bat, immediately identified it as a Hawaiian hoary bat, named for the white tips of the body hair.

"I looked at it for half a second and knew it was a hoary bat; we had seen them before," said Norm Goody, who easily recognized the distinct short, bear-like face of the species.

Since the mid-1970s, the Hawaiian hoary bat has been classified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state as an endangered species, according to the Honolulu Zoo. The bat population is estimated at 2,500 based on 2006 surveys by USFW, said Ann Goody.

"I thought, 'This is cool. They are so rare,'" said Norm Goody. "We were so lucky someone brought it to the humane society, that they thought quick enough to bring it in."

He hung a clean cloth in the box for the bat to rest on and "drove like the proverbial bat out of hell to get back to the sanctuary," Ann Goody said.

Often times, bats, because of their fragility, do not survive the time between rescue and rehabilitation. Ann Goody, well aware of the precarious situation, called Norm every few minutes while he was driving the animal home to the sanctuary.

"It's sort of like being a fireman -- getting to the house before it burns down," Norm Goody said.

Once at the sanctuary, Ann Goody examined the bat and found it starving with a wing injury but no fracture. The couple in 2002 successfully saved another hoary bat. However, the animal's fractured wing prevented its release back into the wild. It ended up finding a home in the Honolulu Zoo with the assistance of zoo veterinarian Dr. Ben Okimoto.

"Emergency treatment included re-warming, fluids and mealworm insides," Ann Goody wrote about the recent bat rehabilitation. "The (bat) was too cold and dehydrated at first to eat but with a bit of time it began to lick the delicious bug insides from its lips. After some time on my hand it went into a special bat box ICU ... In a few hours it was able to eat more ... Calls went out to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Oahu and biologists throughout the islands."

The bat gained three grams, from 12 to 15 grams, while in the sanctuary's care. By the time of its release, the bat returned to a normal and healthy weight, said Ann Goody.

She said it was important to release the bat from the coastline to show that it is the bat's feeding territory. Hoary bat population has declined because of what many believe to be habitat loss, she said. She added that although environmental impact statements for the North Kona coastline say there is no bat population in the area, the EIS

were done during the day and not necessarily during seasons when bats are active. Male bats are usually around the coastline in the fall and females in the summer and spring, she said.

Based on information from the Honolulu Zoo, hoary bats are usually considered solitary. They are found in both wet and dry areas, and from sea level to 13,000 feet. The Hawaiian word for bat is opeapea, referring to the bat's half-taro leaf, canoe sail, cross or radially spoked outline. Bats are still commonly seen on the islands of Hawaii, Kauai and Maui, but are rarely seen on Oahu, according to the zoo. The bat is considered to be Hawaii's only native land mammal. There is fossil evidence of at least one other Hawaiian bat species.

For more information about the Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary or to report an injured or sick wild animal, call 331-8778.