

# Your Photos Help Marine Mammal Research

by Jordan Lerma



**Cascadia Research Collective is a 21-year-old project that studies Hawai'i's marine mammals.**

■ Aloha mai kakou. I was born and raised on the Hilo side of the Big Island. You might recognize my last name from my grandpa Alfred Lerma, who was an avid boat and shore fisherman who could be found talking story at S. Ebisuzaki fishing supply, “Aisles” or “Bayfront” back in the day. He is probably most recognizable from the Las Vegas Magazine, *News at the Cal*.

When I was little, my parents were often busy working so I would accompany my grandpa as he made his rounds. One day that I will never forget started in front of the Naniloa Hotel where we fished for bait before going around Hilo, visiting different groups of fishermen and giving them most of the bait we'd just caught. I remembered thinking, “Why did we work so hard just to give it away?” Then we went to my grandpa's usual spot along the bayfront across the street from the bandstand. We were there for hours without catching anything worth keeping. Just as we were packing up, one of the fishermen we had seen earlier in the day stopped by to drop off an 'o'io and a papio. I came to understand the plantation mentality and why my grandpa worked so hard to help others. Some days when others wouldn't catch and we had enough, it would be our turn to share. Being part of a community means doing our part and working together to accomplish difficult tasks.

A few years ago, I began working for Cascadia Research Collective, joining a 21-year-old project studying the marine mammals that live around Hawai'i. Read the September 2019 article in *HAWAII FISHING NEWS* entitled, “How We Learn About Hawaii's Dolphin and Whale Populations” by Robin Baird for more information.

I have been fortunate to spend days on the boat encountering many of the lesser-seen species of whales and dolphins, the same animals that I heard stories of when sitting with my grandpa and other fishermen years ago.

Much of what we know about these animals comes from long-term photo identification. To date, we have received tens of thousands of photos from more than 250 different people around Hawai'i. We do our best to talk to fishermen, tour operators, private charters and other ocean-goers at the washdown and boat launch to learn more about what they are seeing on the water and encourage them to take photos and submit them to us. I am surprised by the number of people who don't take photos of what they see because they don't have access to a camera or know how to use one.

To do our part and enable those who want to help us learn more about our ecosystem, we are providing some camera systems on loan to fishermen. As a community, we need to work together to learn about the ecosystems around our home. A healthy ecosystem is important for every individual that uses and consumes these resources, whether it be whales and dolphins, or my family and yours.

We are looking for fishermen who are interested in contributing to our long-term study by borrowing a camera and taking photos when there is an opportunity.

We made a video guide to teach the basics of taking photos, downloading and submitting them to us; and we will always be available to answer any questions you might have. More information can be found at <http://www.cascadiaresearch.org/hawaiian-cetacean-studies/cameras-for-fishermen>.

If you or someone you know is interested, please send an e-mail to me at [JLerma@cascadiaresearch.org](mailto:JLerma@cascadiaresearch.org). Mahalo.

... Jordan



**A young Jordan Lerma accompanies his grandpa Alfred Lerma, an avid shore fisherman, to his usual fishing spot along the bayfront as a child.**