

HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

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Did you know...

...the Hawaiian name for the Hawaiian monk seal means "the dog that runs in the sea."



Photo courtesy Lori Mazzuca ©1997

Population trends

Hawaiian monk seals are the most endangered seal species in the U.S., with only 1,300 seals remaining.

The annual birthrate of the Hawaiian monk seal is currently around 150 to 175 pups.

The Hawaiian monk seal is an endangered species. In fact, of the three known species of monk seals, only two still exist -- the Hawaiian and the Mediterranean. The Caribbean monk seal was last sighted in 1952, and is believed to be extinct.

Distribution & Movement Patterns

Breeding populations are at six locations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; a small population lives in the waters off the main Hawaiian Islands.

Sandy beaches and lava benches are preferred "haul out" sites for monk seals.

Monk seals commonly remain at their birth island for life.

Feeding patterns

Prey includes bottom and reef fishes, eels, octopus, and lobsters. Most feeding occurs at depths less than 75 to 90m (although the deepest recorded dive was greater than 500m).

Hawaiian monk seals are a critically endangered species protected under the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Hawaii state law.

Report any suspected violations of these laws to the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964.

Hawaiian monk seals usually haul out on beaches alone or in small groups. If you see a monk seal on a beach, do not disturb it, but DO call the National Marine Fisheries Service to report the sighting – (808) 973-2987.

Remember, monk seals need to rest to conserve energy for hunting and diving at night.

Reproduction

The majority of Hawaiian monk seals do not reach full maturity, which is believed to be 25-30 years.

Females reach sexual maturity at 5-9 years of age.

Roughly 65% of all female adults normally give birth each year. Most females give birth on beaches with adjoining shallow water areas.

Pups are weaned at 5-6 weeks of age; mothers do not eat while lactating.

Pups measure about 3 feet at birth and weigh about 30 pounds; their weight may increase to as much as 150 to 200 pounds before weaning.

Mating occurs in the water, and is rarely observed by humans.

Threats

Entanglement in marine debris

Human disturbance of breeding grounds and of individuals

Groups of adult male seals "mob" female seals, injuring or killing the females, usually at breeding areas where males significantly outnumber females.

Recovery efforts

Marine debris has been removed from island beaches, reefs, and entangled seals.

Adult males and females have been translocated to balance adult sex ratios and decrease mobbing.

Current Research

Current research includes:

studies of reproduction and survival;

censuses of each site;

studies of sources of injury and death;

behavioral studies;

the causes of and mitigation for mobbing;

the decline of seals at French Frigate

Shoals; and,

foraging behaviors, including prey, diving depths, and prey location.

Sponsored by the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and the NOAA Fisheries Office of Enforcement



HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBACK WHALE
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