

# 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 rough sea."



Photo courtesy Lori Mazza ©1997

## Population Trends

Hawaiian monk seals are the most endangered seal species in the U.S., with only an estimated 1,300 seals remaining. Approximately 180 Hawaiian monk seal pups are born annually. Of the three 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

Major breeding populations are at six locations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; a relatively small, but apparently increasing number of seals live in the main Hawaiian Islands. Sandy beaches are preferred "haul out" sites for monk seals, however they haul out on all types of substrate. Monk seals commonly remain at their birth island for life.

## Feeding Patterns

Prey includes bottom-dwelling and reef fish, eels, octopus, squid and crustaceans. Most feeding occurs at depths less than 100m (although they sometimes dive over 500m).

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

*Report any suspected violations of these laws to the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964.*

*Report monk seal injuries, entanglements and sightings to NOAA Fisheries at 1-888-256-9840.*

*Remember, monk seals need to rest on shore to conserve energy for hunting and diving at night. Please keep dogs away from seals to avoid bites and disease transmission.*

## Natural History

The maximum age of the Hawaiian monk seal is believed to be 25-30 years. Females reach sexual maturity at 5-10 years of age. Roughly 65% of all female adults 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 rarely 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. Disturbance by humans can cause seals to abandon important habitat. Aggression by adult male seals can injure or kill adult females or juveniles, usually at areas with larger numbers of adult males. Predation by sharks. Interactions with dogs (attacks and disease transmission). Limited prey resources.

## Recovery Efforts

Marine debris has been removed from island beaches, reefs, and entangled seals. Protection of seals from disturbance. Adult males have been translocated to balance sex ratios and decrease the incidence of male aggression. Rehabilitation and release of underweight pups. Development of recovery plan and a Monk Seal Recovery Team.

## Research

Assess and monitor population size. Determine reproduction and survival rates. Determine causes of poor survival and research mitigation measures. Identify causes of injuries and mortalities. Characterize foraging behaviors, including diving patterns and prey selection. Assess role of health and disease in population trends.

## For more information

Call NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Management Program, 808-973-2937, or the sanctuary headquarters below. For more information, visit the NOAA Fisheries website:

[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/MMWatch/MMViewing.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/MMWatch/MMViewing.html)

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**HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBACK WHALE  
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY**

1-800-831-4888

<http://hawaiiwhale.noaa.gov>

