

Hawaiian Monk Seal

COMMON NAME: Hawaiian Monk Seal

HAWAIIAN NAME: *Ilio-holo-i-ka-uaua* (*The Dog that Runs in Rough Seas*)

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Neomonachus schauinslandi*

LEGAL STATUS: Endangered (Federal and State). Protected under the MMPA. Endangered (IUCN Red List).

APPEARANCE: Monk seals are named for the folds of skin on their head that look like a monk's hood and because of their mostly solitary nature. Females can be up to 7.5 feet long and 450 lbs while males can be up to 7 feet long and 375 lbs. Monk seal life expectancy is 25-30 years.



NATIVE RANGE: Monk seals are endemic to the Hawaiian Islands. The majority of the population lives in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument - the largest contiguous fully protected conservation area in the U.S. Monk seals are also found on the MHI; pupping has been recorded on all islands except Lanai where haul-outs, but not pupping, have been recorded.

POPULATION TRENDS: The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the rarest marine mammals in the world, in part because it was hunted to the brink of extinction in the late 19th century. Over the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has declined by more than 60%. The monk seal population is currently declining at 4% annually and is estimated at fewer than 1,400 individuals.

HABITAT: Monk seals spend two-thirds of their time at sea in waters surrounding atolls, islands, and areas farther offshore on reefs and submerged banks. Monk seals also use deepwater coral beds as foraging habitat. Monk seals are often seen resting on beaches during the day.

DIET: Monk seals are primarily benthic (bottom) foragers, and eat a variety of prey including fish, cephalopods (octopus and squids) and crustaceans (crabs, lobster, shrimp). Adults are generally nocturnal hunters while juveniles forage more during the day on species that hide in the sand or under rocks.

ECOLOGICAL THREATS: Reasons for the decline of the monk seal include:

- Entanglement in marine debris
- Ingestion of fisheries debris or toxic substances
- Human disturbance including intentional kills
- Competition for food and a decrease in food availability for some subpopulations (e.g., French Frigate Shoals)
- Low genetic diversity
- Pup mortality and slow reproductive rates
- Toxoplasmosis from beaches or storm water runoff containing infected cat feces
- Global climate change (if sea level continues to rise many of the remaining beaches will disappear).

MCBH CONSERVATION MEASURES: The majority of monk seal haul-outs at MCBH occur at Kaneohe Bay along the Mōkapu Peninsula beaches. Monk seals also haul-out on the Pu'uloa RTF shoreline, although infrequently, and haul-outs at MCTAB may occur but have not been documented. Sightings at MCBH have increased in recent years with 90 sightings occurring between 2012 and 2016. NOAA Fisheries determined, as discussed in the final rule, that the conservation measures

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carried out by MCBH provide a benefit to the monk seal and its habitat therefore its coastal lands were precluded from critical habitat designation.

MCBH engages in a variety of conservation measures to support the continued health and viability of this species. Specific management actions detailed in the MCBH INRMP are assessed annually as part of the INRMP performance evaluation in cooperation with USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, and Hawai'i DLNR, and revised if necessary due to new information. The following management activities have been implemented and procedures established to protect Hawaiian monk seals to the greatest extent. Management activities, aimed at maintaining ecosystem health, benefit the species indirectly, such as implementing measures to minimize erosion and polluted run-off and invasive species removal.

Conservation measures that benefit monk seals include:

- **Monitoring for presence to help direct management activities.** Natural Resources staff record occurrences and consult with NOAA Fisheries as needed.
- **Seal protection zones.** All monk seal sightings should be reported to the military police at (808) 257-2123 or to NOAA Fisheries' Monk Seal Hotline at (808) 220-7802. If a monk seal hauls-out in an area people frequent, trained, designated staff will erect barriers around the animal and monitor the site. Signs indicating these are protected species, that people and pets are required to remain at least 100 feet away and contact information are placed near the barriers.
- **Removal of marine debris.** MCBH conducts efforts to remove derelict fishing gear and other marine debris from MCBH jurisdictional waters.
- **Restrictions to protect marine species.** MCBH has several regulations in place that provide protection for monk seals. MCBH Kaneohe Bay has a 500 yard seaward buffer zone within which MCBH claims control to all access and resources. Regulations restrict fishing, surfing, and other near shore activities. Pets must be leashed at all times and are only allowed on beaches during specific times.
- **Pet regulations.** Per BO P5233.2, pets must be under control of their owners at all times (indoors, fenced area, or leash). This protects seals from negative encounters with dogs on the beach. In addition, feeding of wild animals aboard MCBH is unauthorized. Cat colonies and feeding stations are prohibited; this helps protect seals from the risk of toxoplasmosis.
- **Interagency cooperation.** MCBH collaborates with NOAA Fisheries regarding data sharing on monk seal sightings.
- **Educational outreach.** MCBH posts warning signs at frequent monk seal haul-out sites and around hauled-out seals. Briefings given to military personnel on Base include information on monk seal reporting and avoidance procedures. Information on monk seal reporting procedures is posted on the MCBH website and included in Appendix C3.
- **Protocols to be followed during military maneuvers and large scale recreational events.**



For more information: MCBH Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan, 2016. Section 6, 7.4, Appendix C & D.

PHOTOS

1. Hawaiian monk seal at MCBH. MCBH. 2010.