

Monk seal takes a snooze at Kahaluu

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Hawaii 24/7 Staff

A female Hawaiian monk seal apparently decided to observe Friday's state holiday and rest up at Kahaluu Beach Park.



The seal, which experts on the scene said may be pregnant, spent most of Statehood Day napping on the shoreline to the north end of the park along Alii Drive.

Park visitors were kept at a distance by ReefTeach and Marine Mammal Response

Network personnel, but were able to shoot as many photos as their cameras could handle.

The seal stuck around all day and into the evening.

The Hawaiian monk seal is listed as "endangered" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species.

Here's some extra



(Photo courtesy of John Wicart)

information about monk seals from NOAA Fisheries Service:

The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the rarest marine mammals in the world. Part of the “true seal” family (Phocidae), they are one of only two remaining monk seal species. The other is the Mediterranean monk seal, and a third monk seal species, the Caribbean monk seal, is extinct.

Isolated from their closest relative 15 million years ago, Hawaiian monk seals are considered a “living fossil” because of their distinct evolutionary lineage.

Females generally mature at age 5-6 and it is unknown when males mature. Monk seals are promiscuous and mate underwater.

Given male-dominated sex

ratios at some breeding colonies, group mobbing of “estrus” females is known to occur, sometimes causing serious injury or even death to the female.

The gestation period is 10-11 months. Birthing rates vary with a range of 30-70 percent of adult females birthing in a given year. While most births occur in late March and early April, birthing has been recorded year round. Newborns are black, and then molt near the end of their nursing period.

Nursing occurs for about 39 days, during which time the mother fasts and remains on land. After this period, the mother abandons her pup and returns to sea. Although they are generally solitary animals, females have been observed fostering others’ offspring.

Monk seals are primarily “benthic” foragers, feeding on a variety of prey including fish, cephalopods, and crustaceans. Their diet varies by location, sex, and age. Adults are generally nocturnal hunters while juveniles spend more time hunting species that hide in the sand or under rocks during the day.

Monk seals generally hunt for food outside of the immediate shoreline areas in waters 60-300 feet (18-90 m) deep. Monk seals are also known to forage deeper than 1,000 feet (330 m), where they prey on eels and other



(Photo courtesy of John Wicart)

benthic organisms. Tiger sharks and Galapagos sharks prey on monk seals.

Habitat

Monk seals live in warm subtropical waters and spend two-thirds of their time at sea. They use waters surrounding atolls, islands, and areas farther offshore on reefs and submerged banks. Monk seals are also found using deepwater coral beds as foraging habitat.

When on land, monk seals breed and haul-out on sand, corals, and volcanic rock. Sandy, protected beaches surrounded by shallow waters are preferred when pupping. Monk seals are often seen resting on beaches during the day.

Critical Habitat

Critical habitat has been designated under the ESA to include all beach areas, sand spits and islets, including all beach vegetation to its deepest extent inland, and lagoon waters out to a depth of 20 fathoms in designated areas of use.

In June 2012, NOAA announced a six-month extension of the deadline for a final determination on the proposed rule, based on comments received during the public comment period. A final revision will be made no later than Dec. 2, 2012.

In June 2011, NMFS proposed to revise critical habitat. In June 2009, NOAA Fisheries announced its intention to revise the Hawaiian monk seal's critical habitat.

Distribution

The Hawaiian monk seal's entire range is within U.S. waters. The majority of monk seals live in six main breeding subpopulations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) at:

- * Kure Atoll
- * Midway Islands
- * Pearl and Hermes Reef
- * Lisianski Island
- * Laysan Island
- * French Frigate Shoals

Smaller breeding sub-populations also occur on Necker Island and Nihoa Island, and monk seals have been observed at Gardner Pinnacles and Maro Reef. Most of the population is within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, designated in 2006. Monk seals are now also found on the main Hawaiian Islands where births have occurred on many of the major islands.

Population Trends

Hunted to the brink of extinction in the late 19th century, Hawaiian monk seals have been declining since modern surveying. The monk seal population is currently declining at 4 percent annually and is estimated at fewer than 1,200 individuals. Biologists predict this number will dip below 1,000 in the next 3-4 years, placing this species among the world's most endangered.

While the larger NWHI population is shrinking, the main Hawaiian Islands population is growing, with a population estimated at more than 100 animals.

Threats

- * Food limitations in NWHI, especially for juveniles and sub-adults
- * Entanglement in marine debris
- * Human interactions (especially in the MHI) including bycatch in fishing gear, mother-pup disturbance on beaches, and exposure to disease
- * Loss of haul-out and pupping beaches due to erosion in NWHI
- * Disease outbreaks
- * Male aggression towards females

* Low genetic diversity

Conservation Efforts

NOAA Fisheries and partners are implementing the Recovery Plan for the Hawaiian Monk Seal.

Research investigating resource availability, foraging behavior (including use of crittercam), reproduction, and disease will help scientists and resource managers make better decisions.

Public education campaigns, including projects to reduce monk seal-human interactions, are building awareness about conserving the species and habitat.

Volunteer groups are being expanded to help rescue and rehabilitate animals and prevent undue stress by keeping beachgoers away from resting animals.

Direct efforts to disentangle seals and remove debris from haul-out sites have led to the removal of 492 metric tons of marine debris in NWHI since 1996, reducing injuries and death due to entanglement and digestion of marine debris.

— Find out more:

www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/m...

www.iucn.org

animals.nationalgeographic.com...

You might be interested in:

1. [Hawaiian Monk Seal has a beach day in Kailua-Kona](#)
2. [Public hearing on proposed monk seal habitat \(Aug. 16\)](#)
3. [Lt. Governor Aiona signs monk seal protection bill](#)
4. [Comment period extended for monk seal recovery actions](#)
5. [Expedition Granted! Studying the Hawaiian monk seal](#)



(Photo courtesy of John Wicart)