

HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

Monachus schauinslandi

Hawaiian name (Ilio-holo-l-ka-uana) “the dog that runs in the rough seas”

Size: Mature males average about seven feet in length and 300 to 400 pounds. Mature females are slightly larger growing to seven to eight feet in length and weighing 400 to 600 pounds. Newborn pups average 30 to 40 pounds.

Life Span: The life of a Monk Seal can span 25 to 30 years.

Food: Monk seals feed on fishes and invertebrates within atoll lagoons along inshore reefs and in deeper water offshore. Common foods for the monk seals are small reef fish, flatfish, eels (except conger and moray), spiny lobster, octopus and squid. It is also assumed that monk seals feed on pelagic fish as well because of the long distances they travel in the open ocean.

Monk seals may eat as much as ten percent of their body weight in a day. They sometimes spend many days at sea before returning to the islands where they sleep and digest their food.

Range: There are three separate populations of monk seals; the Mediterranean (critically endangered), Caribbean (thought to be extinct) and the Hawaiian (endangered).



Status: Monk seals, although totally protected, remain one of the most endangered of all seals. It is estimated that fewer than 1500 Hawaiian monk seals exist today. Most of them inhabit the tiny islands and atolls, which lay to the northwest on the main Hawaiian islands. In recent years, however, monk seals are being sighted around the main islands with increasing regularity. Monk seal species have shown alarming population declines in recent years due mainly to the rapid spread of human activity even to the most remote and isolated areas. Contributing factors to the seal decline has been entanglement in fishing nets, death from predation by sharks, ciguatera intoxication and lower pup survival as the result of human disturbances.

Behavior: Monk seals feed mainly at night. In daylight hours they spend much of their time sleeping. When on land, they may look lethargic, sick or even dead. Actually, the seals come ashore to get their much needed rest. Monk seals keep cool on the beaches by lying on damp sand with light ventral pelage exposed at the water's edge and by making wallows into the cool sand layers. During these periods their respiration includes long periods of breath-holding, and the heart ration that accompanies holding their breath is low. These behaviors result in low levels of metabolic heat production and are excellent natural adaptations to heat exposure.

Monk seals are solitary, both in the water and onshore. When loose groups form on beaches, they gather because the local environmental conditions are favorable. Except for mothers with pups, resting seals avoid bodily contact with each other.