**NATURAL HISTORY**

**The Hawaiian Monk Seal**

*Neomonachus schauinislandi*

- **Phylum:** Chordata
- **Kingdom:** Animalia
- **Phylum:** Mammalia
- **Genus:** Neomonachus
- **Family:** Phocidae
- **Order:** Carnivora

- **Meaning of Names:**
  - Neomonachus: Hawaiian word for monk seal
  - Schauinislandi: Named after Edward A. Schauinsland

**Description**

- Adult Hawaiian monk seals are about 6–7 feet in length and weigh up to 400–600 pounds.
- Male Hawaiian monk seals weigh up to 600 pounds and are larger in size compared to females.
- Hawaiian monk seals have a distinctive shape with broad, flat snouts and small eyes.
- They have a dark grey color on their backs and a lighter grey color on their bellies.
- Hawaiian monk seals are also known for their long whiskers and their ability to swim quickly.

**How to Tell Seals Apart**

- **Male**
  - Larger in size
  - Prominent neck and chest region
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- **Female**
  - Smaller in size
  - Rounder body
  - Smaller neck and chest region

- **Flippers**
  - Male: Longer and more robust
  - Female: Smaller and more delicate

**Diet**

Hawaiian monk seals feed on a variety of marine life, including:

- Large fish: mahi-mahi, ahi, and other gamefish
- Squid: a common prey item
- Crab: a significant part of their diet

**Endangered Species Act**

- Hawaiian monk seals are protected under the Endangered Species Act, and it is illegal to harass, harm, or kill Hawaiian monk seals.

**Conservation Efforts**

- Hawaiian monk seals are an important part of the marine ecosystem and are considered an indicator species.
- Conservation efforts include monitoring, research, and habitat protection.

**How to Be a Good Neighbor**

- Avoid approaching seals or entering their space.
- Keep a safe distance and respect their behavior.
- Report any signs of injury or disturbance.

**For More Information**

- [www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_critical_habitat.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_critical_habitat.html)
- [www.pifsc.noaa.gov](http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov)
- [www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

**How to Prevent Seals from Getting Your Food and Tool**

- Keep your hands, tools, and food away from seals.
- Use a barbless circle hook. Barbless hooks help prevent entanglement and allow seals to release themselves more easily.

**Critical Habitat Designation**

- Critical habitat is defined as the area where Hawaiian monk seals breed, feed, or raise their pups.
- Critical habitat areas are identified based on factors that contribute to the conservation of the species.
- Conservation measures are put in place to protect critical habitat areas.

**For More Information**

- [www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_critical_habitat.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_critical_habitat.html)
- [www.pifsc.noaa.gov](http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov)
- [www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)
HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF THE HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

70 mya

10–11 mya

3.5–11.6 mya

1000–1200 A.D.

1400–1750

1800s to 1900s

1891

1956

2000s

2016

1994

1995

Today

1982

Port to Present

Habitat for millions of years.

The Hawaiian monk seal is given its scientific name Neomonachus schauinslandi.

Scientists conduct the first systematic survey to count the number of Hawaiian monk seals.

Hawaiian monk seal hunting expeditions during the middle 19th century reduced the population to near extinction.

Limited prey availability has been a central factor in the decline of the Hawaiian monk seal population.

Moving Toward Monk Seal Recovery

Recovery Actions and Objectives:

- Investigate and mitigate factors affecting food limitation
- Investigate and develop response to biotoxin impacts
- Prevent entanglements of monk seals
- Reduce shark predation on monk seals
- Conserve Hawaiian monk seal habitat
- Reduce Hawaiian monk seal interactions with fisheries
- Reduce the impacts of contaminants
- Implement and maintain targeted management plans
- Work with partners to develop Hawaiian monk seal recovery plans
- Continue community and stakeholder outreach and changing food resources

Recovery strategies include:

- Studying feeding habits in an unfettered natural environment to test current recovery plans.
- Reducing human-seal interactions in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI).
- Continuing community and stakeholder outreach and education programs.

Recovery plans are designed to comprehensively address both ecological threats and emerging management issues facing the species and recommended actions needed to address those threats. Lt. Governor Aiona signs legislation establishing the facility devoted to this endangered species.

NOAA Fisheries begins collecting sighting data from the Hawaiian monk seal as the official state mammal.

The number of Hawaiian monk seal interactions with fisheries has been declining since 1994.

The MHI population appears to be increasing, which is promising for long-term conservation.

The number of monk seal-human interactions increases.

Recovery targets include:

- Relocating weaned pups from areas of low pup production to areas with low mortality.
- Studying feeding habits to understand regional behavior patterns.
- Relocating weaned pups from areas with low pup production to areas with high pup production.
- Investigate and develop response to biotoxin impacts.
- Reduce the impacts of contaminants.
- Implement and maintain targeted management plans.
- Work with partners to develop Hawaiian monk seal recovery plans.
- Continue community and stakeholder outreach.
- Changing food resources.

Infectious diseases such as salmonellosis, monkeypox and canine distemper virus that have killed thousands of marine mammals in other parts of the world and is also behind measles and canine distemper.

Hawaiian monk seal as the official state mammal.

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