



# NOAA FISHERIES

## Spotlight on Monk Seals

April – May 2016

### About NOAA's Species in the Spotlight

The goal of the Species in the Spotlight initiative is to marshal resources and partnerships focused on saving eight priority threatened and endangered species. Our approach involves intensive human efforts to stabilize these species, with the goal that they will become candidates for recovery.

### Hawaiian Monk Seals

With only 1,300 monk seals left in existence, the life of every seal is critically important to recovery of the species. The Hawaiian Monk Seal Research and Recovery Programs combine science and management to form one of the most proactive marine mammal recovery programs in the world.

### Upcoming Events

The Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team annual meeting will take place June 21-22, 2016, at the Ohana Waikiki East in Honolulu.

# Spotlight on Monk Seals: *Interagency collaboration, monk seals in the media, and a new partner in conservation*

## Engaging Interagency Partners to Tackle a Serious Threat

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that toxoplasmosis, an infectious disease caused by the protozoal parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, poses a major threat to marine mammals in general, and the endangered Hawaiian monk seal in particular. Since 2001, there have been a minimum of eight monk seal deaths in the Hawaiian Islands, with at least three occurring since 2014.

Cats are the sole definitive host of *T. gondii*, and the large number of feral cats in Hawaii is thought to be the primary source of the parasite. NOAA Fisheries staff from the Regional Office and Science Center worked with our State partners at the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to convene representatives from natural resources and human health State and Federal agencies for a workshop on May 23 & 24, 2016. The goals of the workshop were to learn about the impacts of toxoplasmosis and feral cats on wildlife and human health, discuss solutions, and focus on implementing next steps to reduce the negative impacts of toxoplasmosis. This workshop and efforts to reduce the impact of toxoplasmosis to seals are in support of one of the primary goals of the Species in the Spotlight Priority Actions Plan: *detect and prevent catastrophic disease outbreak and disease-related mortality*.

The workshop was very well-received, and there was widespread support for continued agency cooperation to share information and strategically combine resources to address this issue. A follow-up meeting is in the works for July 2016, with staff from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife volunteering to assist NOAA Fisheries and DLNR-DAR in planning.



NOAA Fisheries' team member Aliza Milette-Winfrey leads a small group discussion during the workshop.

## Monk Seal Pupdate

We are well into pupping season and births will stretch into September. There are currently at least **103** baby monk seals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. In the main Hawaiian Islands there are 7 pups.



*PK2, the second pup born on Kaua'i in 2016, with mom RK22 and just a few minutes old in May.*

## Notes from the HMS A.R.C.

NOAA finished deploying their monk seal Assessment and Recovery Camps (ARC) in May. These five camps spread across the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are comprised of two to four researchers who will be counting seals, identifying threats, and intervening to help injured or sick animals. During their first weeks in the field they were busy setting up camp, helping with marine debris removal, and working hard tagging pups. More updates to come in the next newsletter!

### Need more information?

For more information on the Species in the Spotlight effort, please visit [here](#) or contact

[Angela Amlin](#), HMS Recovery Coordinator  
[Charles Littnan](#), HMS Research Program



## Monk Seals in the Media

### The Great Monk Seal Transport

On April 14, 2016, after nearly 7 months of rehabilitation at the Marine Mammal Center's Ke Kai Ola hospital on the Island of Hawai'i, seven female Hawaiian monk seals began an epic journey back to their home in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. It was a heroic effort by NOAA, The Marine Mammal Center, and the US Coast Guard. Learn more about it [here](#).

To view the National Geographic short story please visit this [page](#).

### Averting Catastrophe: Vaccination of wild monk seals

NOAA has been working with partners to develop a plan for vaccinating monk seals against morbillivirus. The disease could possibly be passed to monk seals by unvaccinated dogs that contract distemper, or from other marine mammals such as whales, dolphins, or other wayward seal species. Recently NOAA started vaccinating the wild population of seals. For more information click [here](#).

To view the National Geographic short story please visit this [page](#).

## A New Partner in Conservation: The Hawaii Marine Mammal Alliance



NOAA Fisheries' community engagement and monk seal monitoring efforts are cornerstones of our recovery program, and they dovetail in the form of a dedicated network of volunteers. Volunteers across the islands work with various partner agencies and organizations to report seal sightings, observe seals on local beaches, and spend many hours answering questions and educating visitors and community members about the Hawaiian monk seal.

As of May 22, 2016, the Hawaii Marine Mammal Alliance (HMMA), via an award from the Partnerships for Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery and Marine Mammal Response in Hawaii competitive grant program, has assumed volunteer coordination duties on the islands of O'ahu and Moloka'i. NOAA Fisheries is thrilled with the level of enthusiasm and dedication that HMMA brings to the table, and is looking forward to a productive partnership that provides mutual benefit for humans and monk seals alike.

For more information about HMMA, visit their website at <http://monkseals.org/>.