

# Hawaiian Monk Seal

## The Hawaiian Monk Seal's Diet

### Q: What do Hawaiian monk seals eat?

A: Hawaiian monk seals generally do not eat just one kind of prey. They eat a variety of fish species ranging from the reef to the depths of over 1,500 feet. They also eat squid, octopus, eels, and several types of crustaceans (crabs, shrimp, and lobster).

### Q: Where do monk seals go to find food?

A: Monk seals hunt for food outside the immediate shoreline areas, primarily in the region that is 60-300 feet deep. If fishermen are throw-netting or shore-casting, they will likely not be fishing in the area where the monk seals feed. However, monk seals and fishermen do, on rare occasion, use the same areas. This usually happens along the shoreline as seals leave to or return from feeding. Seals have also been known to eat catch from nets, and bait from fishing hooks. When this happens the seals can become a nuisance. Seals may eat fish and bait because they are "opportunistic feeders." This means that they will feed on a food source if it is "easy" for them to get. They learn these habits quickly. Ultimately this behavior is bad for both seals and fishermen.

### Q: Are ulua and papio a main food source of the Hawaiian monk seal?

A: No. Diet studies indicate that they prefer prey that is easier to catch.

### Q: Are monk seals eating our fish and decreasing fish stocks?

A: It is unlikely that the small number of seals that live in the main Hawaiian Islands would have a great impact on the local fish populations. We know that they feed over wide areas and eat a wide variety of prey including squid, octopus, eels, crustaceans, and fish. Their impact is limited.

### Q: Why are monk seals so fat?

A: Monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands are naturally fat because they are very good hunters. They typically eat about 3% to 8% of their body weight per day (depending on age/maturity) and they store the excess energy from their prey in the form of fat. This fat is important to provide nutrients when they fast during nursing or molting.

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