

Hawaiian Monk Seal

Population and Location

Q: How many monk seals are alive today?

A: The current estimated total is 1,100-1,200 seals.

Q: Where do Hawaiian monk seals live?

A: Most Hawaiian monk seals live in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), with a small population in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI).

Q: How many monk seals live in the MHI?

A: In 2009, 113 seals were individually identified in the MHI, based on flipper tag ID numbers or unique natural markings. Including seals that have not been individually identified, NMFS researchers estimate the total number of monk seals in the MHI is at least 150.

Q: Are there more Hawaiian monk seals in the MHI today than there were in the past?

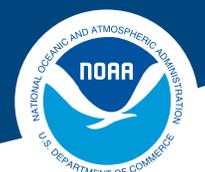
A: Reliable information about the monk seal population in the MHI prior to the 1980's is very limited. Data starting in the 1980's indicate the MHI seal population is growing naturally. Annual monk seal births in the MHI have increased significantly, especially since the mid-1990s. Excluding Niihau, there were 18 and 15 pups born within the MHI in 2008 and 2009, respectively. It is possible that Hawaiian monk seals are beginning to settle back in the MHI, where they once lived long ago. Monk seals seem to be doing well in the MHI despite the relatively high human population. This may be because female seals usually choose remote shoreline areas to give birth. Only a few females have given birth on popular public beaches. There is a misconception that monk seals have been increasing in the MHI because they have been transported by humans or traveled on their own from the NWHI. No one has transferred monk seals to the MHI from the NWHI since 1994. During that year, 21 male monk seals, and no females, were relocated from the NWHI to the MHI. Over time, the number of these relocated seals has naturally decreased as they age, and only four of these seals have been recently observed and reported. Research has also shown that the monk seals rarely migrate from the NWHI to the MHI.



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Kauai: 30-40
Oahu: 30-40
Molokai: 30-40
Maui/Lanai: 5-10
Big Island: 5-10

Identified seals visiting island each year (seals often visit multiple islands)

Q: On what island do most of the Hawaiian monk seals live?

A: Monk seals have been seen on all the MHI. The largest number is likely on Niihau since it is more remote and has less human impact. However, there has not been an official count done on that island. Generally, the number of monk seal sightings tends to increase moving northwest along the island chain and closer to the larger population in the NWHI.

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