




Hawaiian News

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Monk seal ponderings on the Main Hawaiian Islands

A 2004 scientific study by Jason Baker and Thea Johanos focuses on the incidence and abundance of the Hawaiian Monk Seal on the Main (and human populated) Hawaiian Islands. As reported in previous issues, the Hawaiian monk seal population is mostly found scattered through the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (amounting to some 1400 individuals), but sightings in the Main Hawaiian Island (MHI) appear to have increased dramatically in recent years. Information on the species in the MHI has long remained sketchy; the authors note that there were no systematic surveys before 2000.

Relying on aerial surveys and other sightings reports, Baker and Johanos conclude that:

- Population numbers may be increasing, with 45 seals estimated for the MHI in 2000 and at least 52 in 2001.
- Annual births have increased since the mid-1990s.
- Weaned pups in the MHI are longer and have greater girth than those in the NWHI, possibly due to more abundant prey resources.
- The excellent condition of the pups suggests a capacity for continued monk seal population growth within the MHI.
- Risks to the MHI population include human harassment, collisions with boats, and interactions with domestic animals, especially dogs. The capacity for disease transmission, warn Baker and Johanos, could also seriously jeopardise the monk seal population in the NWHI.



A monk seal and pup on O'ahu, Hawai'i

The authors speculate that the species may only recently have recolonised MHI, though the area probably formed part of its historical range.

Baker, J.D. and T.C. Johanos. 2004. Abundance of the Hawaiian monk seal in the main Hawaiian Islands. *Biological Conservation* 116 (1): 103-110. [\[Abstract\]](#)

Hawaiian Press Watch

Monk seal pups born in Po'ipu. August 7, 2004

The rain squall that interrupted a lot of Kaua'i's lifestyle Wednesday morning was a blessing in disguise if you ask Kaua'i monk seal volunteers. A baby Hawaiian monk seal that was born at Poipu Beach Park some time between 7 p.m. Tuesday and 6:30 a.m. Wednesday got some needed privacy, as the squall kept beach-goers from the popular Southshore beach. And for that, the volunteers and federal officials were thankful. Brad Ryon, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service fisheries wildlife manager, was on Kaua'i for the birth of a monk seal at Maha'ulepu just a few days ago, and joined up with lifeguards working at Poipu Beach Park to establish a perimeter to keep people a safe distance from the newborn pup and its mother there. (The Garden Island)

<http://www.kauaiworld.com/articles/2004/08/07/news/news01.txt>

Monk seal on Kaua'i bites pushy tourist in the butt. Friday, August 27, 2004

PO'IPU, Kaua'i — One monk seal bit a tourist on the buttock yesterday after being shoved. Another pair of seals, a mother and her 3-week-old pup, kept hundreds of visitors and residents off the beach. What's happening at Po'ipu Beach is an example of the challenges that remain in efforts to keep endangered Hawaiian monk seals and people apart. The 64-year-old man who was bitten was not seriously hurt in the encounter, which took place in the water fronting the Sheraton Kaua'i Hotel. No stitches were required, but he got a tetanus shot and antibiotics. "The individual got aggressive with the seal. He was trying to get to shore and he tried to push the seal away. I talked to him afterwards, and he was more embarrassed than anything," said Brad Ryon, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries marine biologist. (Jan TenBruggencate, Honolulu Advertiser)

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/27/In/In07a.html>

EndQuote

Devastating results

Public exposure to wild monk seals provides excellent opportunities for education and development of a conservation ethic. However, seals in the MHI are exposed to many threats. Monk seals have proven vulnerable to harassment by humans and their domesticated animals, and the human population in the MHI is approximately 1.2 million compared to less than 100 in the NWHI. Other threats in the MHI include hooking by fishermen, collision with vessels, and oil spills. Finally, there is potential for disease transfer to MHI monk seals from domesticated animals. If this occurs, and disease is subsequently transmitted to the NWHI population, the results could be devastating.

Source: Baker, J.D. and T.C. Johanos. 2004. Abundance of the Hawaiian monk seal in the main Hawaiian Islands. *Biological Conservation* 116 (1): 103-110.

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