

# For Creative Minds

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## Hawaiian Monk Seal Life Cycle

Hawaiian monk seals give birth to one pup at a time, about once a year. Most Hawaiian monk seals are born in spring and summer, but they can be born at any time of year.

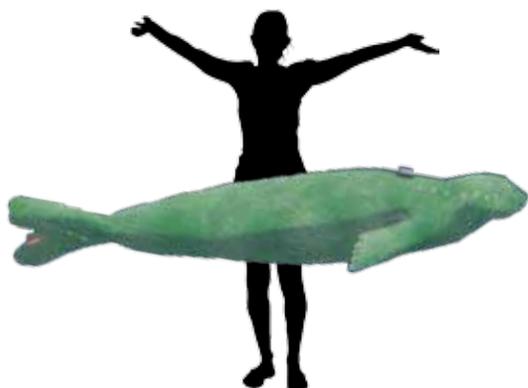
Newborns weigh 30-40 pounds (13-18 kg) and are about 3.3 feet (1 meter) long when they are born. They have black, short, fuzzy hair all over their bodies.

Pups stay with their mothers and nurse for about six weeks after birth. The mothers live on the beach and don't eat during this entire time.

When pups are six weeks old and weigh 150-200 pounds (68-90 kg), their mothers return to the ocean. The pups are left alone on the beach. They learn how to take care of themselves.

As the seals grow, their bodies change. The black fur molts (falls out) and grows back dark silver or grey. The fur on their bellies is lighter. Sometimes algae grow on their fur and turn them green, red, or brown.

Female monk seals are ready to mate when they are 5-9 years old. Hawaiian monk seals live for 25-30 years.



Hawaiian monk seals are 7-7.5 feet (2.1-2.3 meters) long and weigh 375-450 pounds (170-204 kg).

*Is an adult Hawaiian monk seal bigger or smaller than an adult human?*

## Fun Facts

### What makes a mammal?

- has a spine or spinal column
- breathes oxygen from the air
- is warm-blooded
- has hair or fur
- gives birth to live young (most)
- produces milk to feed young

Hawaiian monk seals are a type of marine mammal called a **pinniped**. Walrus; eared seals, such as sea lions and fur seals; and earless seals (true seals) are all different types of pinnipeds. Monk seals get their name from the loose skin around their necks. It looks like a monk's cowl.

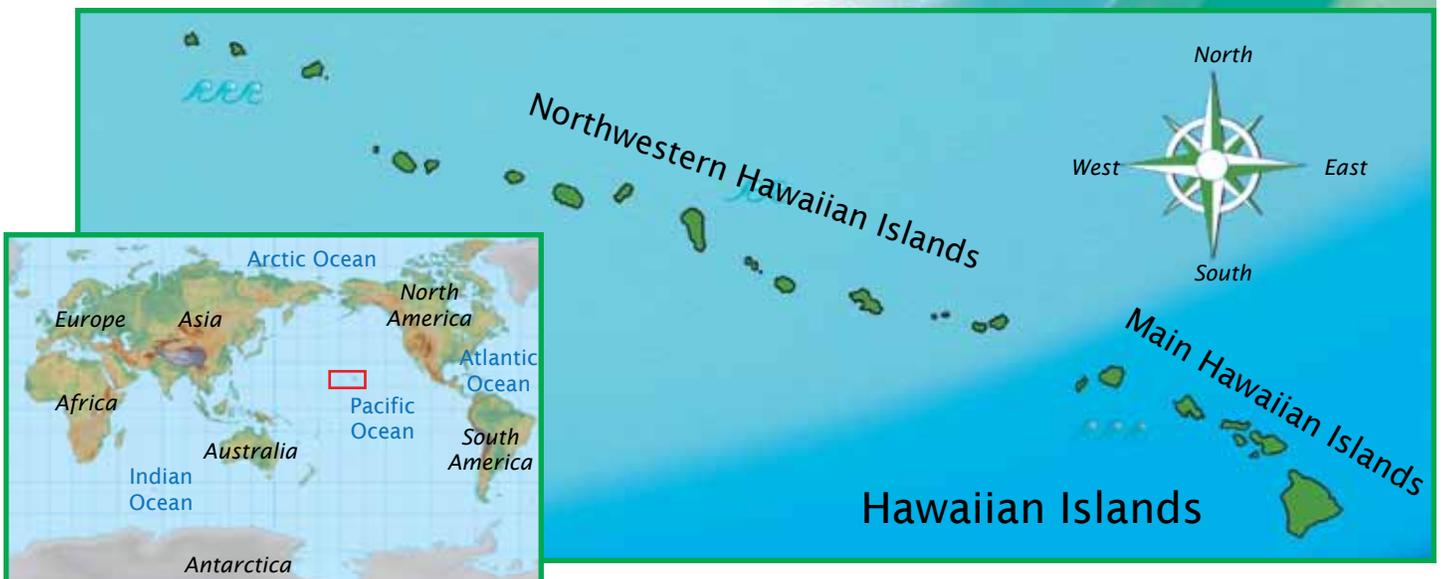
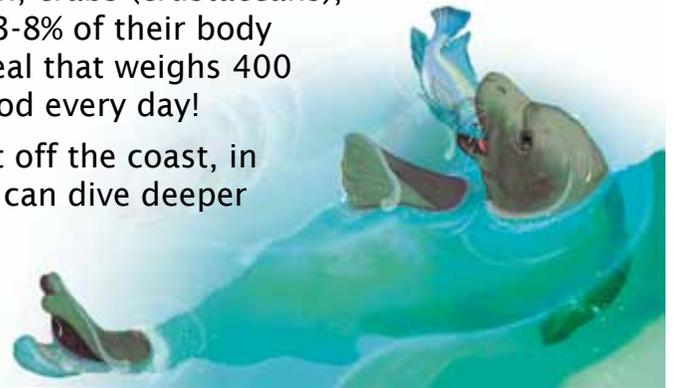
Hawaiian monk seals live in the waters around the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean. They are the state mammal of Hawai'i!

They spend most of their time in the ocean, hunting prey. But they do take breaks to bask in the sun on sandy beaches.

Most Hawaiian monk seals stay near the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, but they have been spotted on all of the Main Hawaiian Islands as well. They return to the same areas every year. Only 10-15% of Hawaiian monk seals travel between islands.

Hawaiian monk seals are predators. They hunt fish, crabs (crustaceans), and octopus and squids (cephalopods). They eat 3-8% of their body weight every day. This means a Hawaiian monk seal that weighs 400 lb (181 kg) would eat 12-32 lb (5.4-14.5 kg) of food every day!

Generally, Hawaiian monk seals hunt for food just off the coast, in waters 60-300 feet deep (18-91 meters). But they can dive deeper than 1,000 feet (330 meters) in search of food.



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## Conservation

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Hawaiian monk seals are **endangered**. If humans don't help them, Hawaiian monk seals could go extinct. In 2016, there were only 1,300 Hawaiian monk seals left in the world.

Why are Hawaiian monk seals endangered?

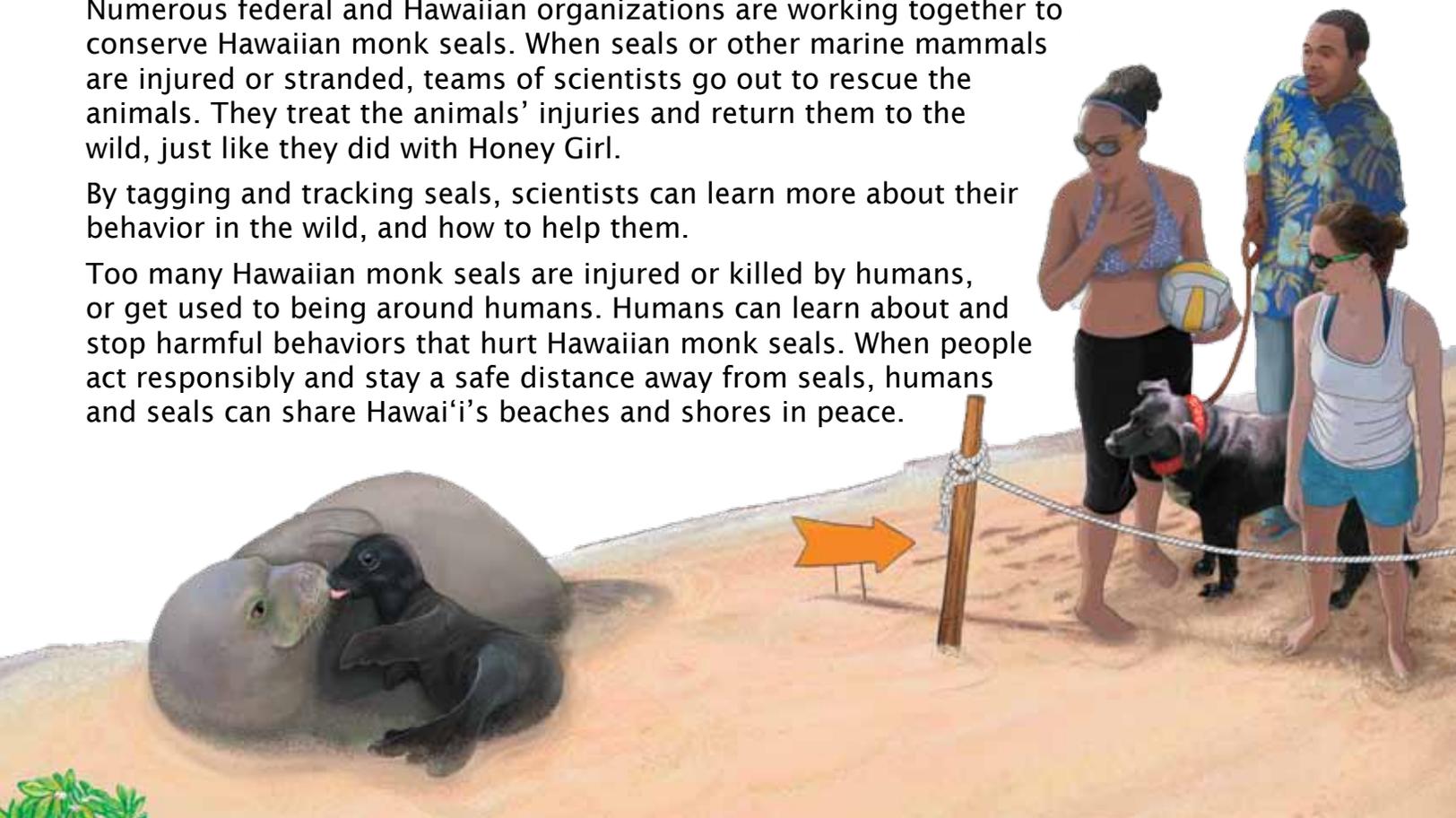
- Seals have to compete with sharks and other predators for food. Some young seals can't get enough to eat.
- Sharks hunt and eat young seals.
- Some humans hurt or kill seals.
- Adult male seals sometimes attack female seals or juveniles.
- Seals need low-lying beaches where they can give birth and nurse their pups. Many beaches are being lost to erosion, sea level rise, or human development.
- Fishing nets and hooks, like the one that injured Honey Girl, can harm or kill seals.
- Seals catch diseases from other seals, humans, or dogs.
- Seals get tangled in or injured by marine debris—lost fishing nets, plastic, and other human trash.
- Some humans try to swim or play with young seals. When wild animals get used to humans, they sometimes try to get too close to humans. This is dangerous for the animals, who can be injured or killed. It can also be dangerous for the humans. The seals may not seem scary when they are small, but the way they “play” in the water can be dangerous for humans.

But even though Hawaiian monk seals are in trouble, there is still hope.

Numerous federal and Hawaiian organizations are working together to conserve Hawaiian monk seals. When seals or other marine mammals are injured or stranded, teams of scientists go out to rescue the animals. They treat the animals' injuries and return them to the wild, just like they did with Honey Girl.

By tagging and tracking seals, scientists can learn more about their behavior in the wild, and how to help them.

Too many Hawaiian monk seals are injured or killed by humans, or get used to being around humans. Humans can learn about and stop harmful behaviors that hurt Hawaiian monk seals. When people act responsibly and stay a safe distance away from seals, humans and seals can share Hawai'i's beaches and shores in peace.



# Rescue and Rehabilitation

Sometimes even wild animals like Honey Girl need help. It takes a lot of people working together to rescue injured animals and rehabilitate them so they can go back to the wild.

Put the following steps of Honey Girl's journey in order to unscramble the words.

The scientists took Honey Girl to Waikiki Aquarium. There, veterinarians removed the fishhook.



Finally, Honey Girl was well enough to eat on her own. She could go home to the ocean.



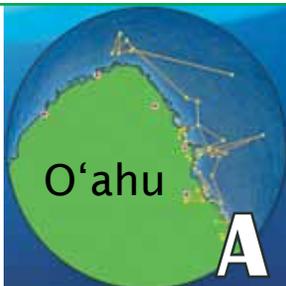
People on the beach saw that Honey Girl was in trouble. They called for help.



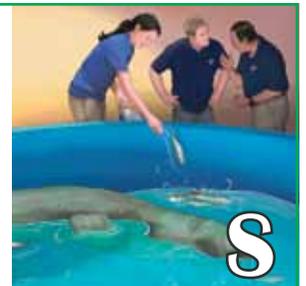
Marine mammal experts came to look for her. They waited for Honey Girl to come to the beach.



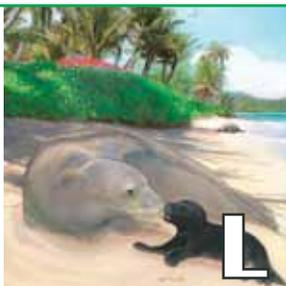
Scientists watched Honey Girl's movements through her tracking device. She was doing well.



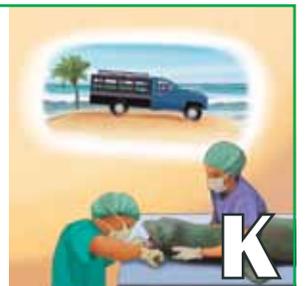
After surgery, Honey Girl was still too weak to eat. Animal experts made special "seal shakes" for her to drink.



Honey Girl fully recovered from her adventure and went on to have more pups.



Honey Girl still needed more help. She went to the Honolulu Zoo for surgery on her tongue.



Answer: monk seal