

Hawaiian Monk Seal

Relocations to the Main Hawaiian Islands

Q: Were Hawaiian monk seals ever brought to the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI)?

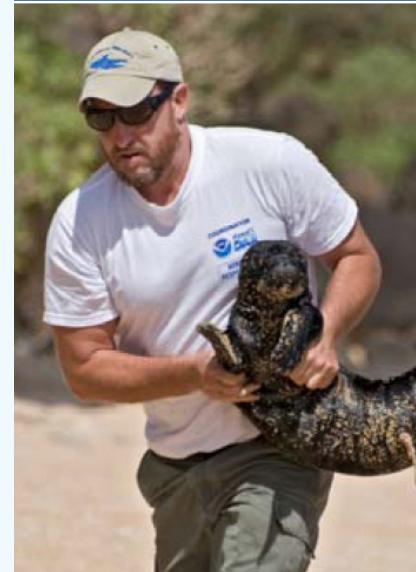
A: Yes. In July and August of 1994, 21 adult male Hawaiian monk seals (*Monachus schauinslandi*) were relocated from Laysan Island in the NWHI to the MHI because males greatly outnumbered females on Laysan Island, creating an unbalanced population. Additionally, some males were injuring and killing female seals. To prevent the further loss of females, it was necessary to remove some of the male seals from the island. Males were selected if they were known aggressors or behaved like aggressors. This is the only known case where seals were taken from the NWHI and released in the MHI. All other seals in the MHI arrived here naturally or were born here.

Q: Were any female seals ever relocated from the NWHI to the MHI?

A: No. All female Hawaiian monk seals in the MHI occur here naturally – only males were relocated from the NWHI in 1994.

Q: Is the relocation of males in 1994 the reason why the monk seal population has been growing in the MHI?

A: No. Before 1994, there was a small naturally-occurring population of male and female monk seals in the MHI. This population appeared to be growing, and at least six pups had been born by 1994 (one in 1962, and five between 1988 and 1993). The relocation is not the source of the MHI seal population and does not represent a contribution to the long term growth of the population because there were already males present that could mate with the females.



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Q: Why is the monk seal population in the MHI growing?

A: The population is growing naturally. The number of monk seals that are born in the MHI has increased since the mid-1990s. In 2008 and 2009 there were 18 and 15 pups born, respectively, within the MHI. These pups “wean” (become independent from their mother’s milk) at larger and healthier sizes in the MHI than in the NWHI, allowing them a greater chance for survival. Also, certain threats to monk seals in the NWHI, such as shark predation of pups and entanglement in marine debris, are not as severe in the MHI. It appears that Hawaiian monk seals are beginning to settle back in the MHI, where it is thought they once lived long ago.

Q: Are the seals that were relocated in the MHI still around today?

A: The number of relocated males is decreasing with time as they age and ultimately die of natural causes. In 2008, only five of the 21 relocated seals were still remaining, representing about 6% of the 88 known individual seals in the MHI.

Q: Are there plans for relocating any other monk seals from the NWHI to the MHI?

A: There are currently no plans to relocate seals from the NWHI to the MHI, but if necessary, relocation could be considered in the future to avoid extinction of the species.

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