

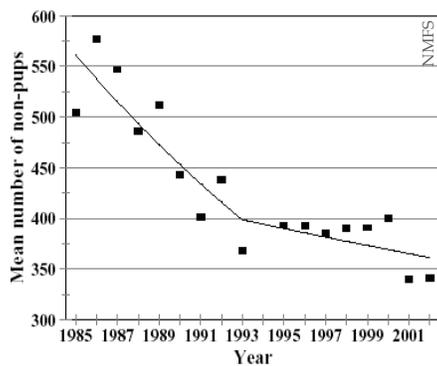
# Recovering the Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal



For the past 15 million years, the Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) has thrived throughout the oceanic waters and coral atolls of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). However, today this ancient species has become one of the world's most imperiled marine mammals, and the NWHI are refuge to the last of its kind.

**Ilio-holo-i-ka-uaua**, the Hawaiian name for monk seal, literally means "the dog that runs in the sea." Today, these seals are highly endangered, as only 1300 individuals are estimated to remain. Tragically, the Hawaiian monk seal is perhaps the last hope for its entire genus, as the Caribbean monk seal (*Monoachus tropicalis*) went extinct in the 1950's and the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) population has only a few hundred individuals left.

**The only marine mammal to be solely under the jurisdiction of the United States, Hawaiian monk seal populations have declined by over 60% in just the last 50 years.**



The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), has devoted nearly 30 years toward the protection and recovery of this endemic Hawaiian seal. Yet, the agency's efforts to-date have proved incapable of halting the seal's spiral towards extinction. Furthermore, the population is slated to decline even further in upcoming years, barring critical actions.

Several threats are affecting the recovery of the monk seal, and there are multiple causes of mortality and decline.

Monk seals have long suffered from entanglement in marine debris, shark attacks, male mobbing, human disturbance, and changes in prey abundance (in part due to fishing). The most pressing current threat is extremely poor juvenile survival rates and the disappearance of breeding females through mortality and aging. There is much debate as to why the seals are having such difficulty, but it is clear that time is running out.

Survival rates of monk seal pups from weaning to 1-year of age have dropped from 80-90% in the 1970s to as low as 15% today. As the older breeding females begin to age and pass away, there are fewer and fewer younger animals entering the reproductive pool, which could potentially lead to a catastrophic collapse of the entire population.

MCBI is working to ensure that priority actions are being taken to protect and recover the Hawaiian monk seal. MCBI aims to catalyze interagency cooperation, to ensure sufficient appropriations for the proposed recovery plan and to prevent the extinction of this remarkable species.

