

Understanding Endangered

Conservation and why it matters

Conservation is important because if we do not preserve our earth, it will negatively affect our lives. Not only does conservation help keep lots of different species alive (including us!), but it also helps all living things to live healthily and happily in harmony. Plus, marine mammals like monk seals are sentinels of the sea providing us with a window into ocean health. A key aspect of conservation is preventing human-caused extinction. This is done by protecting endangered species before it's too late.

Extinction means that there are none left in the world.

Endangered species are a group of creatures that is at very high risk of extinction. Endangered species could easily go extinct because of environmental factors.

In the case of the monk seal, there is always risk in that they are only found in Hawai'i so disease or a natural disaster could threaten the entire species survival. This also means they are endemic.

Endemic means that something is only found in the one place it is native to.

Extant means to still be living.

Critically endangered means there are so few of a species that they are at an extremely high risk of extinction.

Endangered species: Hawai'i style

The Hawaiian monk seal is the rarest extant pinniped in the United States and the only tropical seal left in the world! With only 1,400 of the species left, they are considered endangered. They were recently down listed from critically endangered to endangered with help from Ke Kai Ola ("the healing sea"), the monk seal hospital in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i and our many partners. Until recent years, their population had been in steep decline since the 1950's and still face threats today such as predation, habitat loss, prey limitation, entanglements and more. In fact, 30% of Hawaiian monk seals in the population today are alive as a result of direct recovery

interventions. Ke Kai Ola is the first and only facility in the world able to provide long term rehabilitation of monk seals. The Marine Mammal Center was uniquely qualified to do this work based on years of experience caring for seals on the mainland and consulting on emergency monk seal cases prior to the opening of Ke Kai Ola. Our work would not be possible without support from NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and even partners like the U.S. Coast Guard. Not only does Ke Kai Ola care for monk seals when they cannot heal on their own in the wild, they also monitor monk seals on beaches to make sure they are doing well!



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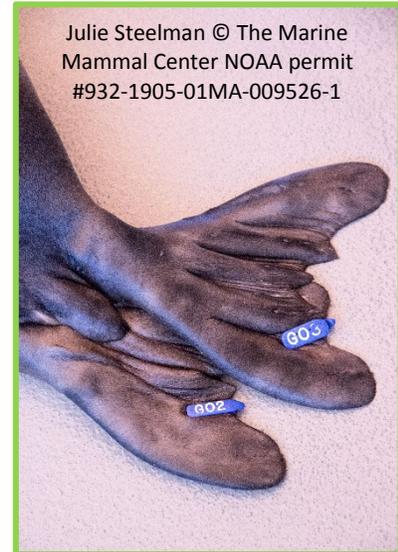


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They also participate in community outreach and education.

Critically endangered → endangered: how we know!

The monk seal population is measured based on how many different seals are found “hauling out,” or coming onto beaches to rest. Monk seals spend much of their lives in the ocean, but they are mammals who need air to survive just like us. They spend long periods of time on land when they are nursing pups or molting their coats. Specialists from Ke Kai Ola monitor all of the seals when they haul out with help from people like you reporting sightings and use this as an opportunity to make sure they are healthy or help them if they are not. Other organizations also monitor seals on the other main Hawaiian Islands and NOAA scientists and volunteers monitor the seals in Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. By identifying and tagging every new seal they find, conservationists are able to understand how the population is growing. This also gives them access to data that can help improve their care at the hospital, on beaches, or even just sharing what they learn with others!



What is conservation to you?

Since everywhere is different, it's time to find something close to home! Monk seals are not the only creature that is endangered. Do any come to mind right away? What about in your community? Using a laptop, tablet, or smart phone, do some research to see what endangered species are near you - animal or plant! Learn more about the species and see how it's being managed and what you can do to help. Awareness is a step towards preservation in itself!

Materials:

- ★ Laptop, tablet, or smartphone
- ★ A notebook and pencil or online resource to take notes
- ★ Check out the example below!

What is one endangered species in your community? What is one threat they face?

Hawaiian monk seals are impacted by sea level rise. Sea level rise occurs when we burn fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas because this releases rampant carbon dioxide into the atmosphere like a heat trapping blanket warming the oceans and melting glaciers. As water warms, it expands and encroaches on low lying beaches like the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands creating less space for Hawaiian monk seals to haul out, rest, and breed.

What is being done to manage the species?

A recovery plan has been developed with an interim goal of down-listing from endangered to threatened. The population is being closely monitored, critical habitat being protected, more research being conducted and seals are now able to be rescued and rehabilitated at Ke Kai Ola.

How can you get involved to help this endangered species?

I can help by reducing my use of fossil fuels by eating meatless meals at least two times a week.

Now it's your turn!

What is one endangered species in your community? What is one threat they face?

What is being done to manage the species?

How can you get involved to help this endangered species?