



## A Sign... Sealed and Delivered

**Raise your flipper if you are the record 10th monk seal to be born at Kalaupapa National Historical Park this year !**

The critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) is one of the rarest marine mammals in the world. Its Hawaiian name, 'Īlio holo i ka uua translates to "dog running in rough seas". Along with fewer than 600 remaining Mediterranean monk seals (*M. monachus*), Hawaii's seals are the last of the world's monk seals (a third species, the Caribbean monk seal, is extinct).

The Hawaiian monk seals' dwindling population of about 1,200 individuals has experienced a continuous decline of about 4% annually in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Conversely, the population of monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands has seen a gradual increase since the mid 1980's, and is now estimated to be about 150 individuals.

The beaches at [Kalaupapa National Historical Park](#) on Moloka'i Island are one of the premier pupping sites in the main Hawaiian Islands. Since 1997, there have been 78 monk seals born on Moloka'i, and all but one of those were born in Kalaupapa. This year we welcomed a record number of births... 10 newborns !

Kalaupapa NHP works in conjunction with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



itself, researchers tag the seal's rear flippers with a red coded tag for long-term tracking. Such research furthers our understanding of the seals' behavior and habitat use, with the ultimate goal of improving conservation management strategies and fostering their proliferation.

–Sylvester (Sly) Lee,  
NPS

For more on natural history, visit Kalaupapa NHP's [facebook](#) page.

researchers on efforts to better understand monk seal [behavior](#) and long-term movement patterns. The NPS [Inventory & Monitoring Program](#) also contributes to the effort through the monitoring of many aspects of the marine realm... from [coral reef health](#) to [water quality](#). The health of the habitat has profound implications with the monk seals' wellbeing.

Once born, a jet-black monk seal pup feeds on the nutrient rich milk from its mother for about 6 -7 weeks. If we are able to locate the placenta soon after birth, it is frozen for DNA analysis. Researchers have demonstrated that there is extremely low genetic diversity in Hawaiian monk seals, most likely due to long-term population size restriction. This has the potential to hinder the overall genetic fitness of the monk seal species.

After weaned from its mother, the plump pup is usually [bleach tagged](#) for visual identification. Bleach tags come off with the seal's annual molt, a process in which it sheds its outer coating for a new one. Later, when the opportunity presents



A tagged flipper.



"I had the honor of receiving the grand prize for the [2012 Share the Experience Employee Photo Contest](#) with this picture of one of our resident seals at Kalaupapa NHP. As I strive to communicate science in meaningful ways to the public, I hope to draw attention to lesser known, but by no means less important, topics ranging from coral chemical ecology to invasive species." –Sly