



## 16 Hawaiian Monk Seals Intentionally Killed Since 2009 And Only One Conviction

[Hawaii Travel News / May 10, 2026 / 29 Comments](#)

Sixteen Hawaiian monk seals have been intentionally killed since 2009, and many more have been harassed. There has been one conviction in 16 years, and that case ended with 90 days in jail and a \$25 fine.

This week, the Seattle visitor accused of [throwing a rock at a monk seal](#) off Lahaina was identified by state officers within hours. Maui Mayor Richard Bissen vowed prosecution at every level. The case moved to federal investigators. All of that happened within 48 hours.

The rock did not kill the seal. And the video drove the response. So has anything changed?

## **The killings the public never saw.**

The Lahaina video spread fast. Most of the prior monk seal killings never had that kind of viral public evidence, even when the cases involved shootings, blunt-force trauma, and animals known to researchers by name.

In March 2023, a juvenile female Hawaiian monk seal, known as Malama (RQ76), was found dead near Waianae on Oahu. She had

been rescued and rehabilitated as a pup, then released back into the wild just months earlier. Forensic experts determined her death was most likely caused by intentional blunt-force trauma.

Malama had not yet produced pups. For a species with roughly only 1,600 animals left worldwide, every breeding-age female is part of the monk seal recovery Hawaii most yearns for, and losing one before she can reproduce is more than another statistic.

In 2021, three monk seals were confirmed to have been intentionally killed on Molokai. One was a one-year-old female known as L11, found shot in the head. All three Molokai cases remain unsolved to this day despite reward offers and years of investigation that have gone nowhere.

Kauai has seen much the same pattern. In 2009, a 5-year-old male monk seal known as RI-19 was found dead at Kaumakani Beach after being shot. In 2020, another young seal, RL52, was also found dead along the Anahola coastline, drawing NOAA and DOCARE attention as part of the broader record of unresolved monk seal deaths.

NOAA has offered rewards of up to \$20,000 in monk seal killing cases. Yet the rewards have not solved the cases. As [Civil Beat reported in 2023](#), sixteen intentional killings have been confirmed since 2009, and only one has produced a conviction.

## **The one prosecution in 16 years.**

The only conviction was a case here on Kauai. In May 2009, Charles Vidinha, a 78-year-old Kauai resident, shot a pregnant Hawaiian monk seal at [Pilaa Beach on Kauai's north shore](#). The seal, known to researchers as RK-06, was the mother of five pups.

Vidinha used a .22 caliber rifle and fired four rounds. He later told investigators that he wanted to scare the seal away from the fish nets he planned to set. The fishing-versus-seals tension Vidinha identified is part of what some monk seal advocates have pointed to as a longstanding source of friction, in which the seals are sometimes seen as competition for the same fish.

He pleaded guilty in federal court to violating the Endangered Species Act. His sentence was 90 days in jail, a \$25 fine, and nothing more required.

That remains the only conviction tied to all of the confirmed intentional Hawaiian monk seal killings since 2009. The sentence helped push Hawaii lawmakers to strengthen state law in 2010, making the intentional killing of a Hawaiian monk seal a felony with penalties of up to five years in prison and a \$50,000 fine.

Hawaii has the law, and NOAA has the rewards. Plus, federal protections have been in place for years. The killing cases have still largely remained open.

## **What a video changes.**

The Lahaina rock incident luckily did not leave a dead monk seal. It left behind a terrible video.

Within days, Maui Mayor Richard Bissen vowed to prosecute, US Senator Brian Schatz wrote to NOAA calling for stronger action, and the case fell under the purview of federal investigators under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

This is not the first time that a video changed a monk seal case. In 2016, at Salt Pond Beach Park in Hanapepe, bystanders recorded Shylo

Kaena Akuna beating and throwing sand at a 17-year-old pregnant Hawaiian monk seal. Akuna, then 19, was charged under Hawaii's felony statute. In 2017, Fifth Circuit Judge Kathleen Watanabe sentenced Akuna to four years in prison. It was the first felony conviction ever under Hawaii's monk seal law.

Akuna's case also complicates any easy visitor-versus-resident storyline. He was a Kauai resident. The Lahaina suspect is a visitor from Seattle. The dividing line clearly is not where someone lives. It is instead whether the act was documented well enough to become a case prosecutors could prove.

The 16 monk seal killings share one thing that the recent Lahaina and the prior Salt Pond cases did not. There was no clear video for the public to watch, share, and press for answers over.

## **Why these other 15 cases are different.**

There are roughly 1,600 Hawaiian monk seals left, with about 400 in the main Hawaiian Islands and about 1,200 in Papahānaumokuākea (the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands).

Clearly, it is political will that has mobilized for Lahaina, which is the right response to wildlife harassment caught on video. A person accused of throwing a rock at a monk seal should face real consequences if investigators can prove the case.

But there were already 16 seals lost to intentional killings since 2009, and somehow 15 of those cases have not produced a conviction. That is the harder record for Hawaii to digest now that one viral video has shown how fast agencies and politicians can move when the public can see the act for itself on social media.

The rock-throw case may, in fact, become what the prosecution officials are now promising. And yet the killings that came before it are still waiting for some resolution.

**Have you followed the Hawaiian monk seal killings over the past 16 years, or seen what enforcement looks like when no video exists? Tell us what you saw and what you think Hawaii should do next.**

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29 thoughts on “16 Hawaiian Monk Seals Intentionally Killed Since 2009 And Only One Conviction”

Darlene T

May 17, 2026 at 7:24 am

My heart is broken. I was hoping the article would tell the Monk seal made it out alive. I hope this cruel man gets what he. deserves. He probably has killed other creatures because he purposely hit that

innocent creature with a big enough rock to its head which he was aiming for to kill it. I hope justice will be served.



REPLY

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Monica

May 15, 2026 at 10:51 am

Thank you. This is the conversation we need to be having about monk seals in Hawai'i. It's easy enough to jump on a bandwagon, but much harder to have difficult conversations about complex social issues without morally simplistic outcomes.



REPLY

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PatG

May 14, 2026 at 6:44 pm

You as well as I know why the other 15 were not prosecuted.



REPLY

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Rob

May 10, 2026 at 7:23 pm

A May 1st Beat of Hawaii story reported on airlines making videos illegal.

This Monk Seal story shows the power of videos and illustrates why the airlines fear video evidence of crew misbehavior.

BOH posted- "Recording has been one of the few tools passengers feel they have when something does go wrong onboard."

In 2025-26 Pilots and FA's have been convicted of crimes including DUI, drug trafficking, weapon charges and filming minors in airplane lavs. What else are the "good old boys" hiding?

 18

REPLY

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Dmc

May 10, 2026 at 6:29 pm

We all know its the fishermen that killed the seals, if you control the ammo/casing, etc and match them to those that buy them at a controlled weapons store, then you can find the killers of seals. These hawaiian seals do not compete with fishermen, its people/countries like ch WHO are competeing with fishermen with the over fishing. Leave the seals alone and even use harsher penalties for harming one ( \$50,000 fine and 7 years in prison and killing a pregnant one=lost of all property/boats, etc, \$50,000 fine and 15 years in prison. Yes I am a fishermen, the fish belong to the those that live in the ocean first, people's take last.

 6

REPLY

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Brian P

May 10, 2026 at 5:37 pm

The person that threw a rock at the Monk Seal should get a stiff fine. A least \$1,000 and be registered on a roster of people, both tourists and locals so stiffer penalties stack. For Anyone harming a Monk Seal or

Sea Turtle, there should be even more severe penalties. Someone kills one, there should be jail time and a fine and for tourists, banishment. For locals, that punishment should be decided by locals. I'm a 5th time visitor who respects and abides boundaries.

 3

REPLY

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Deborah

May 15, 2026 at 5:11 am

A \$1,000 fine is not stiff enough. Far from it in fact. I would like to see investigations and prosecutions begin in the monk seal killings by local fishermen. Those would be considered murder in the first degree – intentional.

 4

REPLY

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Dennis A.

May 10, 2026 at 4:37 pm

Until the authorities punish the lawbreakers to the full extent of the law, the unruly behavior will continue. Throw the book at this idiot and widely publish the fines and jail time received. The public needs to know that these offenses will not be tolerated!

 2

REPLY

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Cockroach

May 10, 2026 at 4:17 pm

Not only are these events disturbing & criminal, so is feeding the chickens, putting out food & water for feral cats! All need enforcement with fines & possible jail time.

There is a time when "domestic pet" can become a pest to other & natural wildlife.

 4

REPLY

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Jane

May 16, 2026 at 2:15 pm

I totally disagree. You cannot lump this guy's actions with those of people who feed feral cats or chickens. Terribly frustrating when I read these comments. I will feed whoever or whatever is hungry. It is our responsibility to care for all those around us. We are at the top of the chain and should be respectful to all things.



REPLY

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PatG

May 16, 2026 at 6:43 pm

Not if you are disrupting the food chain to do it. Nature must remain in balance.

 2

REPLY

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Cockroach

May 17, 2026 at 9:42 am

Enabling chickens & cats by feeding them & not let them follow their instinctive hunting skills is not helpful.

You know it is wrong but you do it anyway is worthy of stiff fines & incarceration.

 1

REPLY

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Tod

May 10, 2026 at 2:52 pm

Our society doesn't care about humans being killed. Why would anyone care about a monk seal. You keep degrading human life, it is amazing that anyone cares about animal life.

It isn't right that these monk seals are being killed.

 5

REPLY

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Richard C

May 10, 2026 at 10:12 am

Soooo all this negative press about harassment of monk seals by tourists, yet it appears that most if not all killings were by residents of Hawaii. Nice

 12

REPLY

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PatG

May 14, 2026 at 6:47 pm

Yes, although it is heartbreaking either way, the fact that 15 were Not persecuted bothers me way more than the 1 visitor who was.

It's just not right.

 3

REPLY

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Christine

May 10, 2026 at 8:48 am

When I lived in Baja 11 years ago in the morning walking along Ensenada Bay you would find dead seals. They were the victims of fisherman shooting them because they were interfering with their nets and livelihood. Endangered and protected wildlife anywhere deserve protection. Maybe larger fines and real jail sentences beyond 90 days should be considered. We visit Hawaii each summer. To be lucky enough to see a monk seal or turtle is the highlight of our vacation.

 7

REPLY

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Jim

May 10, 2026 at 7:25 am

I had read that seeing a monk seal was considered a good luck omen in local Hawaiian culture. So it seems to me the killings, beatings, harassments and stone throwings are symptoms of lack of respect not just of the seals but also an offense against Hawaiian culture itself. Shame on the tourists behaving badly and on the residents for engaging in such activities. I was very fortunate as last year when I stayed at my favorite ocean front condo I got to see a Monk seal on the beach and a majestic green sea turtle swimming in the ocean (strange story, the turtle showed up, swimming towards its unknown destination every single day exactly at 10am). One thing I think the Hawaiian State and Local governments can do is require that warnings about violating the endangered species act has serious criminal consequences be posted in all hotel rooms Whether or not this deters people behaving badly may be debateable but it's a start.

 6

REPLY

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PorkRind

May 10, 2026 at 7:21 am

There have been at least 12 known Hawaiian monk seal deaths caused by toxoplasmosis. This disease is the leading cause of mortality for this endangered species, yet no one responsible for maintaining cat colonies in Hawaii has been prosecuted- only two citations.

 16

REPLY

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Skip E

May 11, 2026 at 11:05 am

I try and notify the residents of the timeshare that I go to about the problems of feeding feral cats, particularly close to the water. The cats are a much bigger problem than humans with regards to the seals and the native Hawaiian birds that the cats destroy. As mentioned above there is little enforcement activity on those who support the feral cats.

 7

REPLY

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Charlotte D

May 10, 2026 at 7:07 am

This is shameful. Throw the book at the jerk who threw the rock.

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REPLY

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William W

May 10, 2026 at 7:04 am

It is unlikely the animals that were shot were killed by off- islanders. Tourists don't arrive on Hawaii with firearms.

 25

REPLY

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Kelly

May 10, 2026 at 6:20 am

DLNR needs a bigger budget so they can put more officers in the field to catch illegal and cruel activity toward wildlife, including nighttime activity like the Kualoa bleach bombing of the reef.

A standing large reward for anyone witnessing/having information of and reporting people who violate wildlife protection laws would help as well.

 7

REPLY

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Michael S

May 10, 2026 at 6:12 am

Thank You for reporting on this Monk Seal story on Maui. I'm so glad Lani was not hurt. The man from Seattle should be banned from ever coming to Hawaii again. These islands are very special.. and do not need people like that to visit. Also in the video that he was being recorded in he mentioned he was rich. So fine him several thousand dollars on top of jail time. It has to be known to the public from all over the world that our marine life is for our enjoyment to watch from a far and not harm them or try to swim with them. After all, the marine life was here way before any of us set foot on the islands. Sincerely!

Michael S

 4

REPLY

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Jane

May 10, 2026 at 5:46 am

This is exactly what is wrong with the HI islands. They want respect, which I totally agree with and support. But they need to stand up and

demand it, start slapping huge fines, jail time, and publicly shame these people who do not show respect for the islands. This soft-on-crime attitude obviously only leads to co-dependency on criminal behavior.

 6

REPLY

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David

May 10, 2026 at 2:47 pm

The other issue is that you cannot demand respect and place all blame on visitors when what locals are doing is far worse or as bad.

 6

REPLY

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PorkRind

May 10, 2026 at 3:11 pm

This is a federal crime- out of the state's jurisdiction. There has to be a federal conviction. States can only pile on top.

 1

REPLY

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Deborah

May 10, 2026 at 5:31 am

The hypocrisy reigns supreme. All of the hoopla about what a tourist did but where's the outrage against locals killing monk seals?? (because of their impact on fishing).

I'm not condoning what the tourist did by throwing a large rock at a monk seal. But let's be real – it's not always the tourist doing these things. The intentional killing of monk seals is not new. It's been happening for a long time. I've witnessed plenty of unsavory acts by locals that do not receive this kind of attention.

 23

REPLY

Lauren

May 10, 2026 at 12:12 pm

The reason the rewards have not been claimed is because the Hawaiian fishermen and other locals protect each other. The public outcry over this latest incident is a perfect example of the hypocrisy of the people here. I am Not condoning what this tourist did. I find it despicable, but I just wish that a comparable amount of outrage would be shown when a local is involved.

 7

REPLY

Dmc

May 10, 2026 at 6:33 pm

and what did the cops do when you recorded it and you did report it all asap

 1

REPLY

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