

HAWAII (USA)- September 2014

December 2013 I see a Mediterranean Monk Seal (the rarest seal of the world- they are around 500 or 600) in Mauritania. I spend 2 full days looking its behaviour.

April 2014 Jon Hall informs us he has seen a Mediterranean Monk Seal in Croatia near Pula.

May 7 and 8th 2014 I drive to Pula. May 9th, after asking at different campings and restaurants along the sea I find this seal, unfortunately in bad health (coughing all the time) and very disturbed by people harassing it. After 1 hour, a bit disappointed of the tourists' behaviour I leave for other parts of Croatia and don't come back.

Later Jon Hall informs us this seal is dead. I am not surprised.

September 19th I fly to Hawaii in the aim to see a Hawaiian Monk Seal, the second rarest seal in the world. They are apparently only 1000 left, mainly on inaccessible islands north of the main islands. But surprisingly if their numbers are decreasing there, they have done a come back on the inhabited islands. On the last count (April) 49 in total were counted on the latter: the largest numbers were on Oahu, Molokai and Kauai. They were very few on Maui and apparently 0 on Big Island.

Since several years I was looking on the web where it was possible to see this species. In 2013 I found "Monk Seal Mania" where passionate locals look everyday for the seals, putting ropes and signs asking people not to disturb them. They are everyday several locations where they are seen, mainly on south Oahu.

OAHU:

Day 1

I check beaches east of Honolulu without luck. By midday I see a very distant Seal on Manana (Rabbit) island.

Day 2

I check the same beaches where they are regular sightings. Again no seal. By midday I see 3 on Manana island, then 2 more hauled out. But they are very far.

Day 3

Early morning I check Kaihalulu Beach-Turtle Bay 5 minutes from the camping where I stay. I find 2 places with signs asking not to approach the seals. I stay until 11am and leave empty handed.

Then I check different beaches on the north, west and south-west of Oahu. Again, nothing.

By the end of the day and before the night I go back to Kaihalulu. I ask to the staff of the resort if they have seen a seal today. The answer is no, but they tell me to come back tomorrow because they are apparently seen daily. I nevertheless I check the first place where I saw signs of seals this morning

and finally nearly stumble on one. It wears a tag (K83). I have not enough time to check the second place with signs.

Day 4

Early morning I am at Kaihalulu Beach. K83 has disappeared. But I find L54 at the second place with signs.

In the late afternoon I come back. K83 is at the same place as the day before, but L54 has disappeared.

MAUI

Day 5

I arrived on Maui where I don't look for seals.

Day 6

I visit Halekala national park looking for birds: liwi, Apapane... In the afternoon I see my first Nenes.

Day 7

I do a boat tour with the Pacific Whale Foundation to Lana'I looking for dolphins, but due to bad weather see only Spinner dolphins. We stay nearly 1 hour inside a large pod.

Day 8

Morning on Maui, then afternoon flight to Kauai.

KAUAI

Day 9

I still look for seals east and west of Poipu where they are regular. Nothing. Then I visit Kilauea National Wildlife Refuge where I see may be 20 Nenes.

Day 10

Morning I visit Waimea Canyon and Kokee State Park and find a few endemic birds.

Afternoon I check again Poipu beaches. No seal. But just before night I find a very little beach with sign of seal and ropes. But no seal again.

Day 11

I check again the same places as yesterday and I am told there was a seal in the afternoon where I saw the ropes. I arrived too late yesterday.

In the afternoon I fly back to Honolulu and later to Salt Lake City

Day 12

I finally arrive at home after a very long trip.

So as I was told everywhere seals move a lot and don't come everyday at the same beaches. In fact the exception seems to be Manana island which is rarely disturbed (it is forbidden to step on this island). Kaihalulu seems to be a regular site. In fact this beach is very close to a large resort, but few people wander on this beach, most of them staying near the resort).

There is another endemic: a bat. I tried to see one at dusk, but didn't see any. They are said to be rare, but it is true I was never at the best sites (border of forest) at the right time.

Finally, it is funny that I looked hard for the seal far from my accommodation and I found 2 just a 5mn ride away. I slept also very next to a site for Bristle tighed curlew: I saw 10. I had seen this species on its breeding ground in Alaska. But to see them in the Pacific where they spend the winter was also very nice.

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