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## **DIVING DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOR OF A REHABILITATED MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL (*MONACHUS MONACHUS*)**

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Amongst the priority actions identified for saving the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) are gaining basic biological information on movements and behavior, and rescuing and rehabilitating wounded, stranded and orphaned pups. A monk seal juvenile rehabilitated at the Mediterranean Monk Seal Rehabilitation Center of MOM at the island of Alonnisos was fitted with a satellite tag (SRDL; series 9000, SMRU, University of St Andrews, Scotland). The seal was released in the National Marine Park of Alonnisos, Northern Sporades and was monitored for 167 days. Post-release, the seal remained close to the islands of the Park and within the 200m isobath, and covered a direct distance of 50 km in less than 10 days. Throughout the monitoring period it spent less time hauled out, while mean dive duration and depth gradually increased. The overall maximum depth of 123m recorded in this study is the largest depth ever recorded for the species. The results indicate that after a 2-month adaptation period the seal exhibited haul out patterns and diving behavior similar to conspecifics and other Pinnipeds of the same developmental stage. Our results attest on the efficacy and effectiveness of the rehabilitation program carried out on the particular animal and provide additional support for the continuation of the rehabilitation program as a conservation measure for the species. We demonstrate that satellite tracking can be a valuable research and conservation tool, even for such a cave-dwelling species. Considering the depth of information collected and the fact that the deployment of a tag did not appear to interfere with the behavior of the animal, we recommend the use of such a methodology in all monk seals released following rehabilitation.

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