

# The Monachus Guardian

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Cover Story: 40 years of monk seal conservation in Turkey



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In Focus: Developing closer ties between Turkey and Greece in monk seal conservation



## Guest Editorial

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### FIFTEEN YEARS ONBOARD “THE ODYSSEY”

by Panayiotis Dendrinos

In keeping with the tradition of Monachus Guardian guest editorials, I delved back into my memory to recall the moment that I first saw this legendary creature. It's already something like 30 years ago, and I remember a calm late afternoon on my home island, Syros, in the Cyclades. I was rowing a small fishing boat, helping a family friend (a passionate fisherman) set his long-line. I was his favourite companion during these fishing missions for two main reasons: I was good in rowing and at the same time retiring enough not to make derogatory remarks about his fishing skills (typical cockfights between passionate fishermen). Suddenly I caught a glimpse of a large animal surfacing a few meters away from the boat and then a few seconds later disappearing gently again into the deep. I was shocked, unable even to imagine what kind of sea monster this might be but I held my tongue, sure that the fisherman didn't notice anything since he was so preoccupied with his “paragadi” (long line in Greek). But a few moments later he turned to me and said: “Did you see the seal? Aaah... you have no idea how sneaky she is. Tomorrow morning we'll hardly get any fish”. Of course at that moment I couldn't even imagine that my life in the future would be so tied to these deserving animals.



Many years later in 1990, my companions in MOm (the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal) and I were thinking about an appropriate name for the organization's research vessel (which we were able to obtain thanks to a generous donation from IFAW). We all agreed that “Odyssey” was the perfect choice since Homer was the first in recorded history to refer to these creatures in his legendary epic poem. Later on, after many years tackling the conservation problems of the species, I realized that this name also holds a deeper meaning, in that the long and difficult path towards protection of the species itself resembles an Odyssey. It's truly a long journey, marked by moments of disappointment, by lost battles and companions that have given up along the way but, on the other hand, also by small victories, achievements and events that offer hope and courage to persevere.

An event that every year gives hope and courage to us all in MOm is the life-full calls of pups and mothers, which echo from the sea caves during the autumn pupping season. But this year, something even more exceptional happened. I had the opportunity of confirming scattered reports that we had been receiving over the last few years about a remote island where monk seals were said to be basking under the sun on open beaches. I can't describe my enthusiasm as we surveyed the island with the Odyssey. Mothers and their pups were basking on the open beaches and swimming around just as in Homer's day. During this breeding season we have so far counted 33 pups during our survey work in the Aegean.



Basking and swimming seals (left to right: 1 pup in the water; 2 pups and 1 adult on the shore; 1 pup at the water's edge).

The photo of the basking Mediterranean monk seals you see here I dedicate to all those people who are committed to the conservation of these rare animals, along with my best wishes for the essential continuation of their efforts.

**Panayiotis Dendrinis**, Alonissos, November 2004.

Panayiotis (Panos) Dendrinis is a biologist, founding member and field research coordinator of MOM/Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal.

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## International News

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### Seal Appeal

The Monachus Guardian is the only dedicated source of news and information on the world's endangered monk seals, their shrinking habitat, and the forces threatening their survival.

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### Climate Change

Thanks to the financial encouragement of the EC, and a thaw in frosty relations between Aegean neighbours, cooperation between NGOs in Turkey and Greece is at last beginning to take hold, leading to better monk seal conservation practices in both countries. [Full story](#)

### “Dakhla Declaration” envisages MPA for Coast of Seals

From 12-15 October, the third meeting of the Working Group coordinating the Monk Seal Action Plan in the Eastern Atlantic was held in Dakhla. The representatives of the range states approved the technical document of the Plan and formulated a document known as the “Dakhla Declaration”, calling for international support for Morocco's initiative to create a Marine Protected Area at the Coast of Seals. [Full story](#).

### Book focus on Hawaiian, Caribbean monk seals

Veteran monk seal conservationists Prof. Keith Ronald (the convener of the landmark 1978 Rhodes International Conference) and Barra L. Gotts are the authors of a book section on Phocidae, Otariidae, and Odobenidae in a recent Wild Mammals of North America publication.

The section includes chapters on the Hawaiian and Caribbean Seal, covering distribution, habitat, feeding habits, behaviour and mortality. It also includes an extensive subsection on seal management including:

- historical background
- international agreements
- international convention protocols
- management policy and application
- population and stock assessment
- fisheries management plans
- international management
- research and management needs

- urbanization and exploration
- drilling and spills
- underwater acoustic effects

**Ronald, K. and B.L. Gotts.** 2003. Seals. Phocidae, Otariidae, and Odobenidae pages 789-864 *in* Feldhamer, G.A., Thompson, B.C. and Chapman, J.A. (Eds.) *Wild mammals of North America*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London: 1-1216.

### NetWatch

Another pair of seals, a mother and her 3-week-old pup, kept hundreds of visitors and residents off the [Po'ipu, Kauai] beach... Wailua resident Alejandro Hernandez brought his nephew, Alex Lopez of Makakilo, to the beach specifically to see the seals. "It's good. It's time for humans to do something for endangered species. I feel sorry for the tourists who come so far to visit a safe beach, but I think it's worth it," Hernandez said.

**Source:** Honolulu Advertiser, August 27, 2004.

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/27/In/In07a.html>

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## Hawaiian News

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### Monk seal ponderings on the Main Hawaiian Islands

A 2004 scientific study by Jason Baker and Thea Johanos focuses on the incidence and abundance of the Hawaiian Monk Seal on the Main (and human populated) Hawaiian Islands. As reported in previous issues, the Hawaiian monk seal population is mostly found scattered through the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (amounting to some 1400 individuals), but sightings in the Main Hawaiian Island (MHI) appear to have increased dramatically in recent years. Information on the species in the MHI has long remained sketchy; the authors note that there were no systematic surveys before 2000.

Relying on aerial surveys and other sightings reports, Baker and Johanos conclude that:

- Population numbers may be increasing, with 45 seals estimated for the MHI in 2000 and at least 52 in 2001.
- Annual births have increased since the mid-1990s.
- Weaned pups in the MHI are longer and have greater girth than those in the NWHI, possibly due to more abundant prey resources.
- The excellent condition of the pups suggests a capacity for continued monk seal population growth within the MHI.
- Risks to the MHI population include human harassment, collisions with boats, and interactions with domestic animals, especially dogs. The capacity for disease transmission, warn Baker and Johanos, could also seriously jeopardise the monk seal population in the NWHI.



A monk seal and pup on O'ahu, Hawai'i

The authors speculate that the species may only recently have recolonised MHI, though the area probably formed part of its historical range.

**Baker, J.D. and T.C. Johanos.** 2004. Abundance of the Hawaiian monk seal in the main Hawaiian Islands. *Biological Conservation* 116 (1): 103-110. [\[Abstract\]](#)

### Hawaiian Press Watch

#### Monk seal pups born in Po'ipu. August 7, 2004

The rain squall that interrupted a lot of Kaua'i's lifestyle Wednesday morning was a blessing in disguise if you ask Kaua'i monk seal volunteers. A baby Hawaiian monk seal that was born at Poipu Beach Park some time between 7 p.m. Tuesday and 6:30 a.m. Wednesday got some needed privacy, as the squall kept beach-goers from the popular Southshore beach. And for that, the volunteers and federal officials were thankful. Brad Ryon, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service fisheries wildlife manager, was on Kaua'i for the birth of a monk seal at Maha'ulepu just a few days ago, and joined up with lifeguards working at Poipu Beach Park to establish a perimeter to keep people a safe distance from the newborn pup and its mother there. (The Garden Island)

<http://www.kauaiworld.com/articles/2004/08/07/news/news01.txt>

## Monk seal on Kaua'i bites pushy tourist in the butt. Friday, August 27, 2004

PO'IPU, Kaua'i — One monk seal bit a tourist on the buttock yesterday after being shoved. Another pair of seals, a mother and her 3-week-old pup, kept hundreds of visitors and residents off the beach. What's happening at Po'ipu Beach is an example of the challenges that remain in efforts to keep endangered Hawaiian monk seals and people apart. The 64-year-old man who was bitten was not seriously hurt in the encounter, which took place in the water fronting the Sheraton Kaua'i Hotel. No stitches were required, but he got a tetanus shot and antibiotics. "The individual got aggressive with the seal. He was trying to get to shore and he tried to push the seal away. I talked to him afterwards, and he was more embarrassed than anything," said Brad Ryon, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries marine biologist. (Jan TenBruggencate, Honolulu Advertiser)

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/27/ln/ln07a.html>

### EndQuote

#### Devastating results

Public exposure to wild monk seals provides excellent opportunities for education and development of a conservation ethic. However, seals in the MHI are exposed to many threats. Monk seals have proven vulnerable to harassment by humans and their domesticated animals, and the human population in the MHI is approximately 1.2 million compared to less than 100 in the NWHI. Other threats in the MHI include hooking by fishermen, collision with vessels, and oil spills. Finally, there is potential for disease transfer to MHI monk seals from domesticated animals. If this occurs, and disease is subsequently transmitted to the NWHI population, the results could be devastating.

**Source: Baker, J.D. and T.C. Johanos.** 2004. Abundance of the Hawaiian monk seal in the main Hawaiian Islands. *Biological Conservation* 116 (1): 103-110.

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## Mediterranean News

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### Greece

#### Orphaned pup “Hippocrates” rescued on Kos

At 20:00 hrs on Thursday 7 October, a Mediterranean monk seal pup was found stranded on Kefalos beach on the eastern Aegean island of Kos, a popular holiday destination. The discovery was made by local inhabitant Yannis Bezas, who immediately alerted the port police authorities. They, in turn, raised the alarm at **MOM**'s headquarters in Athens, whose specialists passed on care and surveillance instructions by phone throughout the night.

According to descriptions provided by the port police, the beached orphan appeared anxious, and was unwilling to return to the sea. Despite following standard watch-and-wait instructions, the pup's mother did not return, making rescue essential.

During the night, local fisherman Sotiris Christodoulou sheltered the orphan at his home, delivering it safely into the hands of **MOM**'s rescue team – inbound on a flight from Athens – early the following morning.

The assistance provided by the fisherman once again illustrated how human attitudes towards the species – long regarded as a fish-stealing, net-damaging pest – are changing for the better.

The pup was a 2 week old male, weighing 20 kilos. Upon examination, it was found to be dehydrated, with a high temperature and irritated mucosa of the mouth and eyes, leading **MOM** experts to believe that lactation had been interrupted for more than 24 hours. Superficial wounds were also found on the head and flippers, most likely a result of stormy weather that may have separated the animal from its mother.

First aid and oral rehydration therapy were administered immediately.

With his condition judged critical, the foundling was then quickly transferred by plane to Athens and then on to **MOM**'s Rescue and Rehabilitation Unit in the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades.

In honour of Kos' most famous figure from history, and in recognition of the island's swift action to save its life, the pup was named “Hippocrates”.



**MOM**'s Jeny Androukaki with Hippocrates in the days following his rescue.



**MOM**'s rehab assistant, Yannis Kyriazis weighs Hippocrates some 30 days after his rescue.

Though exhausted after his ordeal, Hippocrates quickly responded to treatment by nursing staff and MOM's consultant veterinarian.

During his first weeks in rehab, the pup was fed on fish porridge; more recently, filleted fish has been added to his diet. Following standard procedure, the aim of the feeding regime will be to build up the seal's body weight to about 50 kilos to prepare him for his release. Orphaned pups in rehab are handicapped by a lack of mother's milk, which is highly nutritious and can be easily assimilated, thereby allowing the animal to gain weight swiftly.

In the complex rehabilitation procedure that may last up to 6 months, MOM is collaborating with the Veterinary School of Thessaloniki and the Virology Department of Erasmus University, Rotterdam.

### **Greek protected areas in limbo despite prime minister's assurances**

**“Among our political priorities at the same time is the emergence of the protected areas of the country that are part of the Natura 2000 network and to ensure viability of the bodies that undertake their management.”**

**– Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis, Thessaloniki, 16 July 2004**

Although the decision had been predicted as far back as the March elections that swept them to power, it was not until after the internationally-acclaimed Olympics in August that Greece's new Conservative government took action to reshape the country's protected area management authorities.

The first step in that process was a Ministry of Interior edict abolishing, in one fell swoop, all of the management authorities established under the previous government's tenure.

Greece's protected areas have thus been in a state of limbo for most of the year, with management authorities having neither the funds, nor political backing to pursue even their most basic functions. That also included vital guarding activities during the summer tourist season – the time when infringements and holidaymakers tend to peak.

Legally off-limits to fishing and navigation, the core monk seal refuge of Piperi in the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS) saw increased violations by pleasure boaters during July and August. Similar incidents occurred on the marine turtle nesting beaches of the Marine Park of Zakynthos.

The abolition of the management authorities is seen as a prelude to the government replacing political appointees allied with the previous government with their own candidates. It remains to be seen, however, whether the replacements will be chosen according to merit, experience and management needs – certainly a novel approach compared to the cronyism of the past.

The current debacle has developed despite prime minister Costas Karamanlis' firm public commitment to the protected areas, expressed during a pre-party congress speech at Thessaloniki on 16 July 2004. During his speech, he stated: “Among our political priorities at the same time is the emergence of the protected areas of the country that are part of the Natura 2000 network and to ensure viability of the bodies that undertake their management.”

The state's long term financial commitment to the protected areas also remains worrying. As related in our June issue [[Doubts confront management authority on Alonissos](#), TMG 7 (1): June 2004] the government plans to finance the areas through time-limited EU Structural Funds.

Under plans made public by the former government, the management authorities of Greek protected areas would receive just 75% of their funding needs in the first year, 50% in the second, 25% in the third and thereafter, nothing at all. The implication is that the protected areas will then be left to their own devices to raise funds – a sink or swim privatization model that, despite certain merits, also holds considerable risk as management authorities debate the commercial exploitation of the areas under their control while fighting for their own survival.

Without adequate solutions, the long-term viability of the protected areas must remain in serious doubt.

In the meantime, in the government's abolition of the management authorities effectively means that there are no protected areas in Greece worthy of the name.

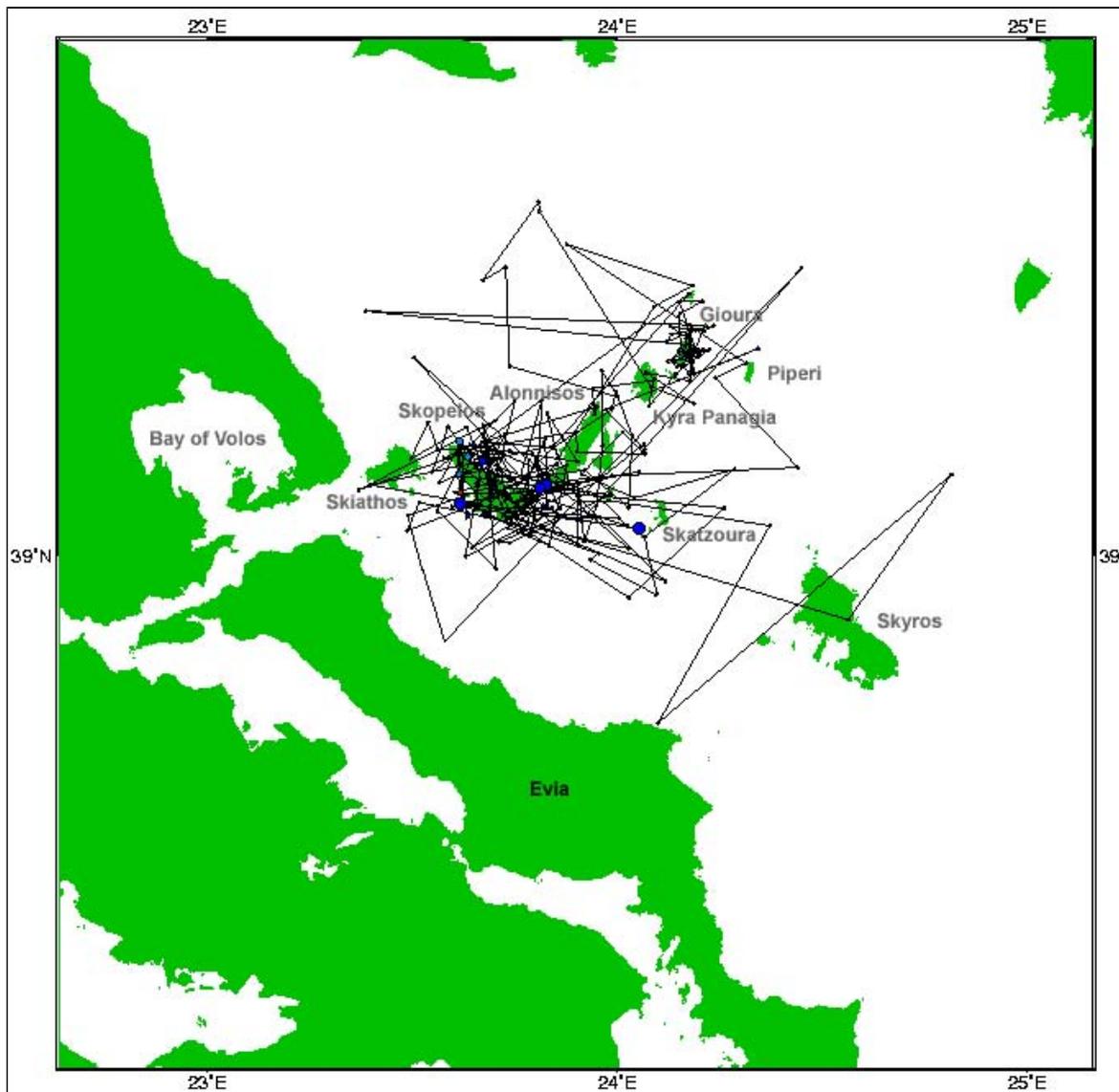
### **Orphaned seal criss-crosses the Sporades Marine Park, sets new diving record**

Six months after his release into the National Marine Park of Alonissos, Northern Sporades [[Clear blue horizon for Dimitris](#), TMG 7 (1): June 2004], satellite tracking continues to show that Dimitris, the orphaned monk seal, is alive and well.

In its post-release satellite tracking programme, [MOM](#) is working with the Sea Mammal Research Unit of St. Andrews University in Scotland, one of the world's most experienced institutions in marine mammal satellite tracking.

Data gathered by satellite will undergo systematic analysis and processing once the transmitter is shed naturally with the animal's first moult.

Initial results, however, already suggest that valuable information will be gained on little understood aspects of monk seal behaviour in the wild, particularly the degree to which individual animals roam between islands and scattered seal groups.



Since his release on 22 May, tracking movements recorded by satellite show that Dimitris has literally combed the expanse of the Marine Park, visiting repeatedly all the inhabited and deserted islands of the Sporades. He has also made it as far as Skyros and Evia.



Dimitris cave snoozing in the Sporades Marine Park

Particularly impressive have been satellite recordings of Dimitris' diving activity, showing that he has reached a maximum depth of 180 meters (following an earlier record of 136 meters). The results effectively rewrite current scientific knowledge of the species, which has hitherto held that Mediterranean monk seals can dive up to 70-80 meters.

Beyond the technical means offered by the satellite, firsthand sightings have since confirmed that Dimitris is alive and well — if somewhat thinner than at his release, at the tail end of a fattening-up rehabilitation regime. On 4 August and again one

month later, MOM researchers found Dimitris sleeping contentedly in a known monk seal cave in the area.

For further illustrated information on Dimitris' rescue, rehabilitation and release, check out our [News Update Archive](#) page.

### **Greeks and Turks join forces in rescue project**

With EU backing, Greek and Turkish monk seal conservationists are embarking on the first phase of a project that will help establish a Rescue and Information Network in Turkey.

[MOM](#) and [SAD-AFAG](#) are collaborating on this venture with the financial support of the Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, whose Civil Society Development Programme attempts to foster civil dialogue between the two countries, whilst also encouraging best practice transfer of knowledge between experts and NGOs.

MOM's Rescue and Information Network (RINT) in Greece has been operating for 14 years, and relies on a coastal network of port police officials, fishermen and others to report monk seal strandings, including dead, sick, wounded and orphaned animals. The majority of orphaned seals that have undergone rehabilitation in Greece have been rescued as a result of the operation of the RINT.

Now, as a result of the Commission's Civil Society Development Programme, MOM and SAD-AFAG will work together on seal rescue and rehabilitation training, and on the establishment of a RINT adapted specifically to Turkey's coastal needs and characteristics.

In November, SAD-AFAG's Harun Güçlüsoy, and the veterinarian of Foça Municipality, Avni Gök, visited MOM's Seal Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre on Alonissos, in the Northern Sporades Marine Park. Whilst there, the two Turkish visitors experienced firsthand the feeding and intensive care protocols currently being administered to orphaned monk seal pup Hippocrates. Other sessions during the one-week visit, led by the chief of MOM's rehabilitation division, Jeny Androukaki, and by Stella Adamantopoulou, in overall charge of the organisation's Rescue and Information Network, were earmarked for discussion on the practical formation of a RINT in Turkey.



SAD-AFAG's Harun Güçlüsoy with Hippocrates.

The principal aims of the project include:

- Prompt and organized reaction for rescuing sick/injured/orphaned animals in the eastern Mediterranean, in order to increase their chances of survival.
- The full necropsy of each dead animal stranded (depending on the stage of decomposition) in order to diagnose cause of death.

- The development of a common methodology in collecting information on monk seals and reacting to emergencies in both parts of the Aegean.
- Agreement, on an operational basis, on how to react in case of an environmental disaster or mass mortality event (infectious diseases within the monk seal populations, oil spills, etc.) in either part of the Aegean, affecting one or both countries.

“Using similar methodologies and analysis techniques will surely provide better results for the conservation of the species in our common sea, the Aegean,” explained Harun Güçlüsoy, following the information exchange and training sessions on Alonissos.

Veterinarian Avni Gök added: “During our week here we gained valuable experience through the sharing of information and through the practical training we received with Hippocrates. This will be very useful in the event of orphaned pups being found in Turkey.”

Greek experts will travel to Turkey in the next phase of the project, preparing the groundwork for the organisation and launch of the country’s new Rescue and Information Network.

The Monachus Guardian will carry a full report in our next issue.



Outside MOM’s Seal Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre on Alonissos (from left to right): SAD-AFAG’s Harun Güçlüsoy, MOM’s rehabilitation assistant, Yannis Kyriazis, MOM’s rehabilitation division chief Jeny Androukaki and Foça Municipality’s veterinarian, Avni Gök.

## **LIFE draws to an end in Kimolos, Karpathos**

In January 2005, the EU LIFE-Nature programme “The Mediterranean monk seal: Conservation actions in two Greek NATURA 2000 sites” will be completed. Its aim was the protection of the Mediterranean monk seal through the implementation of specific management actions in two of the species’ most important habitats in Europe: the Karpathos-Saria area in the southeastern Aegean and the Kimolos-Polyaigos complex in the Cyclades [TMG Mediterranean News, *passim*].

During the four years of the programme, it was possible to gain a comprehensive picture of the status of the Mediterranean monk seal, which verified the significance of these areas for the species. At the same time, pilot conservation actions were implemented, which may be continued by the management bodies when they are established and fully-operational. The value of the natural environment of the areas concerned was also conveyed to locals and visitors. Finally, the active participation of schoolchildren in environmental protection actions probably constitutes the most significant achievement of the programme, as these are the future users of these areas.

In spite of this hard-fought effort, the main requirement for the long-term protection of these areas, namely that they be legally constituted, has yet to be achieved despite prior assurances by the Ministry of Environment, Land Planning and Public Works that this would take place within the time frame of the programme.

Today, five years later, even though the Management Body for Karpathos-Saria has been established, it has no specific object of action, as the area has not been legally constituted, while only a few steps forward have been made with respect to Kimolos, its establishment as a marine park having been delayed indefinitely.

Concluding that the permanent presence of field teams is indispensable to the continuing implementation of management actions in Kimolos and Karpathos, as well as to their promotion as legally constituted protected areas, MOM aims to continue its efforts following the completion of the LIFE programme.

Thus, awareness-raising actions and monitoring of the Mediterranean monk seal population will continue in Kimolos with the support of the PEP programme for the South Aegean, while actions in the area of North Karpathos have been included in the proposals of the Management Body for funding by the Entrepreneurial Programme for the Environment.

Believing that the responsibility for the effective protection and development of these areas lies with all of us, we request that the Ministry of Environment and other responsible ministries, the European Commission and all involved stakeholders, commit whatever support they can to achieve the immediate institution of these areas. – Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

### **South Aegean initiative**

A highly significant project for the protection of the Mediterranean monk seal has been included in the PEP programme for the South Aegean, which will function between 2004-2006. Entitled “Conservation and promotion of the natural environment in the southwest Cyclades”, the project has educational and research objectives and includes a series of actions on the islands of Antiparos, Folegandros, Sikinos, Sifnos, Serifos, Milos and Kimolos-Polyaigos. The project’s Action Plan includes research to verify the status of the Mediterranean monk seal population in the SW Cyclades as well as ecological awareness-raising activities.



The MOm research boat “IFAW-Odyssia” at Antiparos.

Research priorities also include the monitoring of the monk seal population in the Kimolos-Polyaigos area, which has proven to be one of the most important habitats for the species internationally.

Elsewhere within the project’s geographical limits, MOm researchers have carried out detailed surveys of the coastline of Milos, Antiparos, Sikinos and Folegandros. Thirty-three monk seal caves were identified during the research. The majority of these refuges were identified in Milos, where the presence of a newborn seal was also recorded during the reproduction period. – Panayiotis Dendrinou, MOm.

### **Tourism threat seen at Kimolos; industrial fishing at Karpathos**

As part of their 2004 monk seal monitoring programme, MOm researchers gathered data on sea-borne human activities in both Kimolos and Karpathos during the summer months. In Kimolos, tourist activity is particularly high during the peak summer months, with the regular presence of motorized pleasure boats near the reproduction refuges of the Mediterranean monk seal — thus making the adoption of protection measures even more urgent.

In the Karpathos area, it appears that the most intense pressure comes from industrial fishing throughout the year and is a factor to be considered in the institution and future management of the area. – Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

### **Ecotourism guide to Kimolos**

As part of MOm’s environmental education activities, the pupils of the Junior High-School of Kimolos, under the guidance of their teacher, Ms. K. Anagnostopoulou, designed an ecotourist guide to the island, with detailed information, photographs and recommended walking paths for nature lovers.

The aim of the guide is to promote the area and to encourage the development of alternative types of tourism by attracting visitors who are personally interested in the protection of the natural environment. The guide was printed with the support of MOm and the European Commission’s LIFE funding mechanism, the Ministry of Environment and the Cyclades Prefectural Authority. Copies were also distributed among the pupils of Kimolos, to enable them to fund an environmental education trip through sales to the local public. – Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

## Season's pups

The first pups of the 2004-2005 breeding season are being counted by MOm researchers in the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS), at Kimolos-Polyaigos in the Cyclades and at Karpathos-Saria in the southeastern Aegean.

To date, 7 newborn pups have been recorded in the NMPANS, 6 in Karpathos-Saria and 5 in Kimolos-Polyaigos, the latter once again underlying the importance of this island complex as a Mediterranean monk seal breeding site. – Panayiotis Dendrinis, MOm.

### EndQuote

#### Déjà vu

“For months the National Marine Park of Zakynthos, home to the endangered *Caretta caretta*, or loggerhead turtle has remained closed and unguarded. The management of the park owed money to insurance funds. The seven employees had withheld their labor since March because they had not been paid and Greece was at risk of punitive action by the European Court... A 90,000-euro grant recently approved by the Environment Ministry has given the park a new chance.”

**Source:** Hope for turtle habitat, Kathimerini English Edition, Friday, November 5, 2004.

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### Italy

#### A brief survey of Linosa island

More than 160 km south of Sicily, just in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, the island of Linosa forms, together with Lampedusa and the rock of Lampione, the Pelagian archipelago. A wonderful island of ancient volcanic origin, called Aethusa by the ancient Greeks and Algusa by the Romans, with a great variety of colours: from the black of its rocks and little shores to the green of the Mediterranean bushes, from the deep blue of the sea to the heavenly clean sky.

Linosa is quite a small island, round shaped, with a surface of 5.4 sq km. The *Caretta caretta* sea turtles still lay their eggs on its beaches. Until the end of the 1950s, it also hosted, along with Lampedusa, "shrinking" colonies of monk seals, sadly all exterminated in the end, by the fishermen. Today, the sea fauna of Linosa is still quite rich, with a great deal of Mediterranean fish and more and more subtropical fish: it would surely permit a vital monk seal population, as would the bigger and calcareous island of Lampedusa, if some recolonisation would take place. Sporadic sightings at the two islands are reported by some locals, but it is difficult to verify their truthfulness. The attitudes of the fishermen, now reduced in number, should also be evaluated.

At the end of June, two members of the "Gruppo Foca Monaca" went to Linosa for a short holiday. Visiting from the sea the so called "scogli dei bovi marini" (marine cows rocks), once inhabited by the seals, it was noted that some caves still seemed suitable for resting and reproduction.

Apart from the month of August, the island does not see a great many tourists, a factor that might help in any natural recolonisation by monk seals. – Luigi Guarrera & Simonetta Maccagno, Gruppo Foca Monaca.

### Madeira

#### A new biological station at Desertas

The construction of a new biological station at the Desertas Islands commenced in October. This measure, supported by the regional government, aims at improving living conditions for park rangers, whilst also providing an information centre for visitors.

With the monk seal pupping season peaking in October/November, our monitoring of the breeding area intensified. Three births occurred in the beginning of November. Sadly, one of these pups, still showing its umbilical cord, died. The necropsy was not conclusive but several injuries on its body suggest that the young seal may have been dashed against the rocks in stormy weather. This is one of the primary threats for this population since the birth season coincides with the season when sea storms are most frequent.



© Rosa Pires  
Tabaqueiro beach, Desertas Islands.

This year the females and the pups are again using Tabaqueiro beach and, observing the group of seals there, we could detect a new breeding female [see [One pup – three “mothers”](#), TMG 7(1): 2004].

On Madeira island, we are organising a public opinion survey to discover what Madeirans think about the monk seal's return to their island, and also to gauge their level of knowledge of the species. – Rosa Pires, Parque Natural da Madeira.

**Parque Natural da Madeira.** 2003. [Help us to help the monk seal](#). English brochure and sighting register: 1-2.

[1.3MB]

## Mauritania & Western Sahara

### Rehabilitated seal 'Weam' found dead

In September this year, the carcass of the rehabilitated seal 'Weam' was found on a beach at the Cabo Blanco peninsula, about 15 km south of the breeding caves. A year and a half had passed since we lost track of her movements [see [Weam is one year old](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002 and [Rescue, release and post-release monitoring of Weam](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002].

She was rescued by members of the CBD-Habitat Foundation in September 2001, during a storm when she was three days old. She was rehabilitated in the facilities of the Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic and Fisheries Research (IMROP) in collaboration with the SRRC of Pieterburen. The process lasted five and a half months. She was released 27 February 2002 at the beach known as “Barco de azúcar”, two kilometres away from the breeding caves and inside the reserve of the Coast of the Seals [see [Conservation actions on the Cabo Blanco peninsula – a new approach](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002].



Remembering better times: Weam monitored by guards in the Coast of the Seals reserve.

After the release, she was tracked and monitored by the CBD-Habitat team through direct observation as well as by satellite. During the first months she used the beaches of the western coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula and even made movements that allowed her to reach the National Park of Banc D'Arguin.

After two months, she became accustomed to hauling out on open beaches near the release site, where she also had effective protection by the surveillance patrol. This was good news and also offered hope that other members of the colony would begin to imitate her and use open beaches, thus beginning a re-adaptation to the original resting and reproductive habitat of the species. In an occasional manner, but with some periodicity, Weam would use a different beach at the south, outside the protected reserve area. This was where her carcass was eventually found.

On 25 February 2003, we saw her alive for the very last time. During the following year and a half we didn't have any news of her despite periodic coastal inspections and interviews conducted with every person we could find at the beaches.

Then last September, during one of these coastal inspections, a half-buried corpse in the sand that the wind had exposed alerted us. Immediately we realized that it was a monk seal carcass, and knew it was Weam as soon as we found one of the identity tags we had applied to her rear flipper. She had suffered a broken skull, had been opened with a knife in the ventral area, and someone had removed all the meat and fat. The carcass had been well buried to avoid detection, and it clearly seemed that someone had killed her to benefit from the meat and fat.

Two conclusions and one recommendation can be obtained from this incident:

On the one hand, it is necessary to draw attention to the spectacular demographic growth of the

nearby city of Nouadhibou that has caused a significant increase in human pressure over the area surrounding the Coast of the Seals Reserve. This fact leads us to think that if this phenomenon continues, the future expansion of the monk seal will be in the northern area of the Cabo Blanco peninsula.

On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize that Weam displayed strong docile behaviour, as a consequence of her habituation to humans during the rehabilitation process. When she was returned to the wild, she never showed any sign of fear of human presence, nor any impulse to escape. This behaviour was almost certainly responsible for the capture and death of the seal. Her presence was known and respected by local fishermen who would fish on the coast, who could even touch her while she was sleeping.

Taking these facts into account we believe that to avoid in the future incidents of this kind, rehabilitation protocols should be reviewed in order to minimize human contact with seals. If that is not possible, then an acclimatization process should be included in order to modify such docile behaviour towards humans. – Miguel Ángel Cedenilla and Pablo Fdez. de Larrinoa, Fundación CBD-Habitat.

### **Collaboration agreement between CBD-Habitat Foundation and the NGO Nature Initiative**

Last September, the presidents of CBD-Habitat Foundation and the Moroccan NGO Nature Initiative signed a collaboration agreement in order to jointly develop conservation actions for the monk seal and other threatened species in the region of the south of Morocco, in the former Spanish Sahara.

Such an agreement is the consequence of dialogue and staff exchanges undertaken during this last year between both associations.

One of the first actions performed has been to begin the exploration of the coast south of Cap Barbas, in order to determinate the status of monk seals in the area, currently unknown. Two short expeditions already performed with the Royal Navy and the Institute of Research of Marine Resources (INRH) allows us to have some hope regarding the positive presence of monk seals along this coast. Information campaigns are being designed to inform artisanal fishermen and military authorities about monk seals and their endangered status in the area. In a complementary step, we are already working on the installation of a permanent surveillance patrol and of a monitoring station in the area, as well as a series of actions to improve fishermen's quality of life and the promotion of sustainable fisheries in the area, avoiding the use of trammel and gill nets.

Under this collaboration framework, CBD-Habitat with Nature Initiative and the INRH have already edited a school booklet for the kids of Dakhla.

All the actions that will be developed are taken from the recommendations of the Action Plan for the Recovery of the Monk Seal in the Eastern Atlantic, adopted by the four countries of the species' range in the Atlantic, Spain, Portugal, Morocco and Mauritania. – Pablo Fdez. de Larrinoa and Miguel Angel Cedenilla. Fundación CBD-Habitat.

### **Third Monk Seal Recovery Plan meeting held in Dakhla**

From 12-15 October, the third meeting of the Working Group coordinating the Monk Seal Recovery Plan in the Eastern Atlantic was held in the city of Dakhla.

The General Secretary of Marine Fisheries of Morocco and the General Director of the Research Institute of Marine Resources opened the proceedings. The meeting allowed the Working Group to determine whether to pursue the recommendations established at the PHVA workshop held in Valsain, Spain in 2002 [see [International workshop report issued](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002 and [International workshop wrestles with Atlantic issues](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002]. The Deputy Executive Secretary of the Convention of Migratory Species (Bonn Convention), Mr. Lahcen El Kabiri, assisted the meeting, which was convened and organized by the Ministry of Environment of Spain and the Institute of Research of Marine Resources of Morocco. CBD-Habitat Foundation participated in the meeting's coordination as well as in the preparation of all working documents used during the sessions.



Working Group participants gather in Dakhla to advance the Monk Seal Recovery Plan in the Eastern Atlantic.

Apart from the members of the Working Group (coming from Portugal, Morocco, Spain and Mauritania), the meeting was also attended by many participants and guests from the local and regional civil and military authorities, as well as representatives of various NGOs and Moroccan agencies involved (Ministry of Water and Forests, National Office of Fisheries, etc.).

The representatives of the range states approved the technical document of the Plan and elaborated a document named the “Dakhla Declaration”, which apart from technically approving the Plan, also calls for international assistance in funding it and for support for Morocco’s initiative to create a marine protected area for monk seal conservation and to apply a management plan for a future national park in the area.

After the meeting, some members of the delegations travelled to Mauritania with the representatives of CBD-Habitat Foundation, to visit the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony and to enjoy viewing the 14 pups that were present in the breeding caves at that moment. – Pablo Fdez. de Larrinoa and Miguel Angel Cedenilla. Fundación CBD-Habitat.

## Morocco

The [Fondo para la Foca del Mediterráneo](#) (FFM) undertook a monk seal survey along the Mediterranean coasts of Morocco in August, reports Xisco Avella, and all signs were negative. The animal FFM researchers were accustomed to seeing in the same spot is now dead, its corpse having appeared on a beach last spring (FFM received dozens of communications confirming the event).

In the Chafarinas archipelago, probably for the first time ever, there was not one recorded monk seal observation during the current year. This seems to indicate that the minute population that survived on the neighbouring mainland coast has now been eradicated.



The seal well-known to FFM researchers was found dead in spring.



The new coast road now cutting through monk seal habitat.

Most worrying of all, adds Avella, a huge alteration of habitat is now underway in the form of a main road, being built to join Saidia (near the Algerian border) and Tanger (in the Straits of Gibraltar). At some places, this only involves enlarging an existing old and narrow road, far away from the seaside, but in others – in some of the wildest remnants of Morocco's Mediterranean coast, and around the site once frequented by the seal found dead in spring – an entirely new road is being built. This involves construction over sea cliffs and seaside slopes, with debris being thrown down to the sea, in some cases even burying marine grottoes.

After 15 years of public awareness activities in the area, reports Avella, the latest developments in Mediterranean Morocco are hard to accept.

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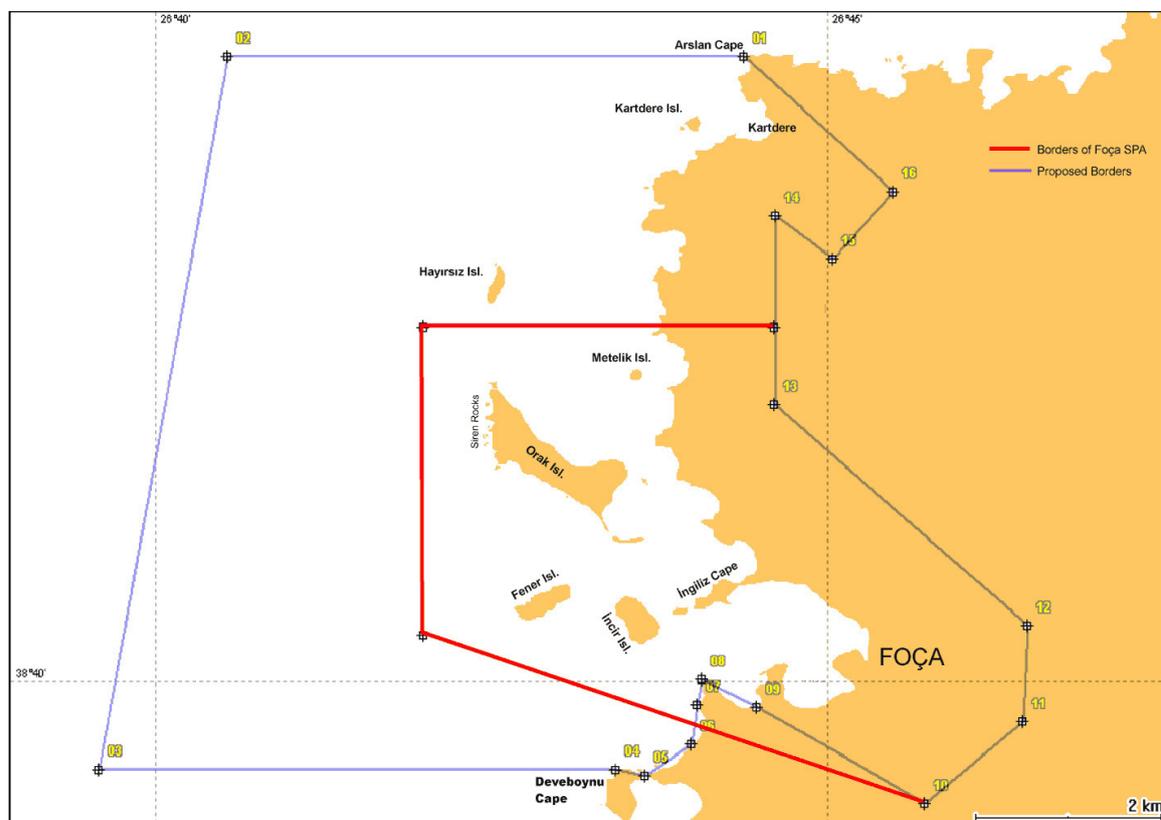
### Turkey

#### Enlargement procedure underway for the Foça SPA

Foça and the small archipelago adjacent to its mainland coast were selected as the first “Pilot Region” in implementing the Turkish National Seal Conservation Strategy in 1991. Just one year earlier, some parts had been declared by the council of ministers as a ‘Specially Protected Area’ or SPA.

Foça was also the first area in Turkey where long term monk seal conservation projects were launched in 1993. Since then, SAD-AFAG, with support of the Local Monk Seal Committee, has identified many precautionary measures to safeguard the marine environment and monk seal habitat, submitting these recommendations to responsible official bodies.

Some of these precautions were subsequently endorsed by the authorities and translated into official regulations at various levels.



Map of the Foça SPA.

On the other hand, the Foça Pilot Region has never enjoyed a legal conservation status or a management plan that integrates the entire pilot region and the various regulations in force within it.

Under a recent EU-funded project with WWF MedPO, SAD-AFAG prepared draft zonation plans for Foça, the Karaburun Peninsula and West Icel coasts, and submitted these to the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 2003 [see [Coastal Zone project draws to a close](#), TMG 7 (1): 2004].

As a result of this initiative, the new Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr. Osman Pepe, agreed to recognize the declaration of five monk seal conservation areas – defined by the Technical Committee of the Turkish National Monk Seal Committee – as having priority for action [see [Turkish government pledges 5 new protected areas for the Monk Seal](#), TMG 7 (1): June 2004].

In accordance with the Minister's decision, the first step in this process is the expansion of the Foça SPA's borders to incorporate the larger Foça Pilot Region. The procedure has since commenced, with SAD-AFAG's specific enlargement proposals now being opened for discussion between the ministries by the Authority for Specially Protected Areas, in accordance with relevant Turkish legislation. If accepted, the borders of the SPA would be enlarged about four fold. – Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG.

### **New patrolling system in Aydıncık**

The patrol boat purchased by SAD-AFAG through the EU-funded SMAP project [see [Coastal Zone project draws to a close](#), TMG 7 (1): 2004] is now ready for duty. Based in the Cilician Basin town of Aydıncık, the boat will be used to safeguard the Kizilliman MPA, no-fishing-zones and the fishery regulation area around Aydıncık.



The launch of the new patrol boat at Aydıncık.

SAD-AFAG delivered the boat to Aydıncık last spring but then became locked in protracted debate with the Local Governor and Gendarmerie on responsibility for operating costs. The new Governor of Aydıncık, following an evaluation and discussion period, has since signed a contract with SAD. According to the terms of the contract, the local governorship will be responsible for the operating and maintenance costs of the boat while SAD-AFAG will provide know-how based on its experiences gained in Foça since 1993. Two personnel have already been trained in Foça during the SMAP project to perform guarding duties in Aydıncık. – Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG.

### **Foça patrol boat high and dry**

Due to reasons as yet unknown, the Volvo Penta KAD32-P diesel engine of the Foça MPA patrol boat "Cevre" was heavily damaged recently. Upon inspection, two holes were found in the block, a crankshaft broken into four pieces, one broken and two bent piston rods, as well as other damaged parts. The cost of repair has been put at 17,000 euros, roughly 60% of the price of a brand new engine of the same type, even after special discounts for Volvo Penta parts and labour. The authorized service centre of Volvo-Penta in Izmir has inspected the damaged engine but could not provide a clear reason for the damage sustained. The fate of the engine and patrol boat will be discussed at the next meeting of the Foça Local Monk Seal Committee. The most likely decision will be to look for an alternative solution, since the cost of the repair is about the same as the price for a second hand boat with engine. In addition, the hull of the "Cevre" has not been in good condition for several years and replacement was already on the agenda. The President of the Foça Fisheries Cooperative, Mr. Yasar Balta, who is also the captain of the patrol boat, has already pledged to donate a secondhand 100HP marine diesel engine for a new patrol boat. – Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG.

### **New office space donated by Foça city council**

The new mayor of Foça, Gokhan Demirag, and the town's city council, have agreed to donate free office place for SAD-AFAG's local team. Because of current financial constraints, SAD-AFAG's office in Foça would otherwise have faced imminent closure. SAD-AFAG's request for assistance

was approved unanimously both by the town council and the mayor. In addition, the mayor has also agreed to provide 50 liters of diesel fuel per month for the operation of SAD-AFAG's vehicle based in Foça. – Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG.

### Cilician Basin ecotourism project enters second phase

The Cilician monk seal colony is growing steadily. Every year, new pups are joining the group in this pristine area where mass tourism has yet to intrude. Yet the tendency of the government's tourism policies suggests that the mass tourism threat will arrive in the area within several years. As tourism continues to grow and expand into new natural areas, more concrete action needs to be taken to safeguard the Earth's biodiversity, while promoting tangible economic benefits to local communities.

Since the establishment of the Kizilliman MPA, local people, particularly those in the peripheral towns of Aydıncık and Bozyazı, have become more aware of the monk seal colony. Recognizing ecotourism as a conservation tool that can involve local people in the sustainability of the MPA, whilst also providing a means of gaining economic support for the conservation project in the area, a second ecotourism was implemented in June 2004. With the co-operation of Gruppo Foca Monaca in Italy, a group of 9 persons visited the Cilician monk seal habitat over a 10 day period. During the trip, a bus was hired from a local company and accommodation was provided in a small locally owned hotel. The group dined in seven different restaurants in the area and visited traditional local markets in three different towns. Five artisanal fishermen's boats were used during daytrips and fish bought from the local fishing cooperative in Aydıncık where, in the past, monk seals had been considered an enemy and were slaughtered.

Revenues Generated by the Local Community			
Type	# involved	Days	Revenue (€)
Accommodation	2 hotels / 6 persons	8	1,350
Transport	1 minibus / 2 persons	10	750
Fishermen	5 fishermen / 9 persons	5	750
Catering	7 restaurants / 20 persons	9	750
Shopping	5 stores and 3 local markets	-	~500

Although the number of participants was very limited, the total revenue to the local community is remarkable. For instance, the daily average landing catch of local fishermen in the area is about 10 kg of fish (~15 Euros). The revenue generated by the tour is thus 10 times higher for them than going fishing. The local economy is mainly driven by the secondary (leisure/holiday) house owners visiting the region for only a month between 15 July and 15 August. The ecotour, on the other hand, which was organized outside the high season, provided extra financial benefits to the locals involved.



Participants of the latest 'ecotour' to the Cilician coast.



Local fishermen, whose boats were used for daytrips, have benefitted financially from the programme.

Conservation activities on the Cilician coast are carried out by the Middle East Technical University Institute of Marine Sciences, yet the project has faced significant financial constraints during the last year. Because of the ecotourism initiative, however, the guests have effectively underwritten the running cost of our office for a year.

We believe that these initial ecotourism pilot schemes will provide convincing evidence for the authorities to consider implementing alternative, low-impact tourism on a wider scale, mindful of the need for sustainable tourism in sensitive areas. The trials are also providing important data for planned future studies:

- A carrying capacity analysis will be conducted to calculate how many visitors the MPA can accommodate
- Identification and establishment of boating routes and nature trails within the MPA with lowest possible human impact
- Training local tourist guides and development of information guides for visitors.

It is increasingly clear that, where tourism development is not guided by principles that promote conservation of nature and contribute to the well-being of local people, both human welfare and biodiversity can seriously suffer as a consequence.

Locals from coastal communities who have benefited from the first and second phases of the project (including Bozyazi, Aydincik, Bogsak, Anamur, Melleç, Göksu, and Tasucu) provide ample encouragement that we are on the right path. – Serdar Sakinan, Project Assistant, METU-IMS.

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## Cover Story

Vol. 7 (2): November 2004

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### 40 YEARS OF MONK SEAL CONSERVATION IN TURKEY

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1. SAD-AFAG

2. Dokuz Eylul University, Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology

In the 19th century, Francis Beaufort, Captain of the HMS Frederikssteen, a British naval ship surveying the eastern Mediterranean, saw herds of monk seals on Provençal (Dana) Island on the southern coast of Asia Minor (Beaufort 1818). Almost a century later, Karekin Deveciyan briefly mentioned the presence of monk seals on Turkish coasts while he was director of the Istanbul fish market (Deveciyan 1914). Up until that point, no research or conservation activity focusing on monk seals in Turkish waters had been carried out, and indeed, it was not until 50 years later, in May 1964, that Prof. Bahtiye Mursaloglu's milestone article was published in the Journal of Mammalogy. During this period, in the absence of any legal protection, monk seals had been persecuted systematically by fishermen and hunters for their skin and blubber (Kiraç & Savas 1996, Kiraç 2001).

Mursaloglu (1964) examined five live and dead seals collected from the Black Sea, Aegean Sea and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey and taxonomically identified them as the Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus*. This was the first scientific record of the species in Turkey. In the "environmental history" of Turkey, the study also marked the starting point for modern research and conservation activities for the protection of monk seals.

#### Generation to generation

The 40 year period from 1964 to 2004 can be broadly categorized into three main generations, the first represented by the scientific article by Mursaloglu in 1964, the second by scientific studies from 1974 until 1987 and the third by research and conservation actions from 1987 to date. These indicate that monk seals still survive along Turkish coasts with a considerable population, estimated most recently as 104 individuals (Güçlüsoy et al. in prep.).

The second generation activities began with Ronald and Healey's questionnaire studies in 1974 (Berkes et al. 1979) and continued with the field surveys of Fikret Berkes, a Turkish Canadian biologist, between 1974 (Yediler et al. 1993) and 1978 (Berkes 1976 & 1978, Berkes et al. 1979). Mursaloglu's efforts continued in parallel, marked by her participation in the 1978 First International Conference on the Mediterranean Monk Seal in Rhodes, and field surveys conducted between 1979 and the early 1980s (Mursaloglu 1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1986 & 1991). Although Mursaloglu and Berkes had worked separately on various Turkish coasts, their studies often supplemented and confirmed each other's findings, identifying the general status and distribution of monk seals in Turkey. Mursaloglu, however, also concentrated on the behaviour of the species, and convened the 3rd International Monk Seal Conference, held 2-6 November 1987 in Antalya, Turkey (Kiraç & Bas 1999). In the meantime, French scientist Didier Marchesseaux also undertook a brief interview survey along some Turkish coasts in order to gain a better understanding of the monk seal's population and distribution (Marchesseaux 1987).

During the second generation period, significant scientific results were published by Mursaloglu (1984b, 1984c) and Berkes et al. (1979) on monk seal population, distribution and biology, as well as threats to the species that varied according to region (Karamanlidis & Johnson 2002). These,

in turn, provided a substantial basis for third generation scientific and conservation activities by younger conservationists and researchers in Turkey; indeed, they played a crucial role in enabling a species and habitat status assessment to be made, comparing the 1990s-2000s with the previous two decades.



Bahtiye Mursaloglu studying a monk seal poster in her Ankara home.



Bahtiye Mursaloglu with fishermen in Foça.

The important findings of Mursaloglu and Berkes, however, went virtually unnoticed by the broader public, by other academics and even by the responsible government departments, such as the Ministry of Forests (MoF) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Official permission for fishermen to kill dolphins in the Black Sea, for example, ignored the obvious vulnerability of the monk seals in the area, and the great risk of extermination they faced by these licensed “dolphin hunters”. Such short-sighted government decisions were taken despite Mursaloglu’s warnings in 1964 and despite IUCN’s inclusion of the species in the endangered red list in 1966. Indeed, monk seal slaughters continued until an official ban was imposed on the dolphin hunt in the Turkish Black Sea in 1980.

The most significant contributions by Berkes et al. (1979) were in determining the habitat, distribution and population of monk seals on the Black Sea, Aegean and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey, while also forming an analysis of threats according to region. Berkes also proposed the establishment of international marine parks between Turkey and Greece (Berkes 1978) while Mursaloglu (1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1986 & 1991) provided substantial knowledge on the biology of the species including mother-pup relations, cave usage, and habitat requirements. Both stressed the importance and urgency of *in situ* protection.

### Third generation science and conservation

November 1987 should be regarded as another milestone in the Turkish history of monk seal conservation, when representatives of the Mediterranean Seal Research Group (AFAG) and the Istanbul University Faculty of Aquatic Products (IU-FAP) met at the 3rd International Monk Seal Conference organized by Mursaloglu on behalf of Ankara University in Antalya. Ironically, this conference marked the end of Mursaloglu’s long professional career but coincided with the inaugural activities of AFAG (Kiraç & Bas 1999) and IU-FAP. Indeed, AFAG had been established only a month before the Antalya conference as a group within the Middle East Technical University Sub-Aqua Society in Ankara, a step triggered by Berkes through his invaluable guidance.

Despite retirement, Mursaloglu increased her contact with AFAG during the last years of her life and agreed to act as the scientific consultant of AFAG’s UNDP-GEF funded “BlackSeal” project, a commitment she maintained until her death in 1999 [see [Obituary: Bahtiye Mursaloglu, 1918–1999](#), TMG 2 (1): May 1999].

Following its establishment, AFAG continued basic research and conservation activities with several short-term expeditions. The most prominent ones were carried out in the Dilek Peninsula National Park in February 1988, in Olimpos National Park in May 1988 and at the Black Sea in 1990. A “seal-fish farm interaction” survey, the first of its kind in Turkey, was also conducted at the Bodrum Peninsula in 1992. These initial and seriously under-funded field activities were conducted by only a handful of AFAG staff and volunteers, often using their own savings.



A monk seal off the Siren Rocks in the Foça Specially Protected Area.



SAD-AFAG's Yalçın Savas during surveys in the Foça Specially Protected Area.

Meanwhile, the efforts of AFAG and IU-FAP were bearing fruit in the press, with the publication of several popular articles drawing attention to the plight of the species. This, in turn, created a synergy among interested groups. In discussions with AFAG, Foça Municipality expressed a serious interest in becoming actively involved in the conservation of this rare marine mammal. Stemming from this dialogue, AFAG proposed the establishment of the National Monk Seal Committee (NMSC) and the adoption of a National Strategy to encourage a more coordinated approach to the conservation of the species. With the blessing of the Ministry of Environment, governmental departments, NGOs, universities and other interested parties were invited to attend the inaugural NMSC meeting in Ankara in January 1991. The meeting concluded by unanimously adopting a "National Strategy for the Conservation of the Monk Seal in Turkey".

Fifteen NMSC meetings were held at more or less regular intervals between 1991 until 2001 and, during that 10-year period, Local Monk Seal Committees were also established, initially at Foça (1992) and Yalıkavak (1993), and later at Aydıncık and Karaburun. However, aside from Foça, none of these local committees have ever functioned adequately – due to an absence of outside support – in finding solutions for the conservation of the species and habitat protection; nor have they succeeded in introducing sustainable fisheries in their respective areas.

In June 1993, the Foça Pilot Project (FPP) commenced, with AFAG coordinating conservation efforts in the town funded with a grant from WWF. The initiative quickly generated interest and support among Foça locals and fishermen, The aims of the project were also reinforced with the provision of a patrol boat by the Ministry of Environment (MoE). The FPP yielded important results, not only in respect to determining the status of the species in Izmir Bay but also in developing experience in coastal and marine zone management planning. The project also developed a close working relationship with locals, artisanal fishermen, the Foça Municipality and the Foça Governorship.

Since then, AFAG has carried out numerous field expeditions, research initiatives and public awareness activities along Turkish coasts, mainly supported by organizations from abroad, including WWF (International, national offices and the Mediterranean Programme Office), UNDP-GEF, the Henry Ford European Conservation Awards, the European Commission, the Prince Bernhard Nature Conservation Fund, and the Van Tienhoven Foundation. National sponsors have included ?S Bank and TUBITAK.

With the financial help of WWF and initial coordination by AFAG, the Middle East Technical University - Institute of Marine Sciences (METU-IMS) carried out research along the west Mersin stretch of Turkey's Mediterranean coast from 1994 to 1997.

### **Uniting for a cause**

During this period, there were also attempts by NGOs to increase efficiency, influence and funding potential by taking united actions on behalf of the monk seal.

In 1989, AFAG's written proposal for a collaborative agreement with DHKD (Turkish Society for the Protection of Nature), failed to elicit a positive reply. AFAG, however, went on to operate in an effective manner under SAD, established in 1994.

Later, in 1997, an attempt to establish a Turkish Monk Seal League among SAD-AFAG, the IU Faculty of Aquatic Products (IU-FAP) and METU-IMS also proved unsuccessful, and it quickly fell into a moribund state after just a couple of meetings.

A year later, at SAD-AFAG's invitation, three METU-IMS monk seal conservationists joined forces with SAD-AFAG in order to spur coordinated and effective action on behalf of the monk seal. Although this collaborative effort produced clear and beneficial results during the first years, regrettably, the two organisations had already drifted apart by the end 2003. Whatever the precise causes of this estrangement, and without apportioning responsibility for it, there is little doubt that it has had a negative impact on the monk seal's chances of survival in Turkey.

Despite the recent and tragic extinction of the species in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean monk seal continues to survive along Turkish coasts. Although time is not on conservation's side, this is undoubtedly Turkey's opportunity to demonstrate to its Mediterranean neighbours — most of which lost the species in the mid 1950s — that the monk seal *can* be saved. The opportunity is not only a chance to save a single species, but to preserve some of Turkey's last unspoilt coastal zones. Given sufficient foresight, those who champion the monk seal cause in Turkey will also see the rewards in establishing well-managed marine protected areas, for the benefit and enjoyment of fishermen, tourists, local people and monk seals alike.

## **ASSESSMENT OF 40 YEARS — A SUMMARY**

40 years have passed since the first modern scientific study was published on monk seals in Turkey and, in reviewing that period, we can list the following major achievements as well as weaknesses:

### **Strengths and achievements**

#### **I. Research and acquiring scientific data**

- The first scientific study authored by Mursaloglu in 1964 confirmed the occurrence of the endangered Mediterranean monk seal along Turkish coasts; it formed an important basis for later research and conservation efforts.
- During the second generation period of Turkish monk seal history, significant and wide-ranging scientific data were collected by various researchers, covering distribution and abundance, habitat requirements, breeding and feeding. Such information proved indispensable in determining conservation priorities for the species in Turkey (Berkes et al. 1979, Berkes 1976, 1978, Mursaloglu 1984a, 1986, 1991).
- Third generation scientific studies played an important role in acquiring more precise and up-to-date data on the distribution and status of the species, and have also furthered knowledge on ecology and biology of the species (Öztürk et al. 1991, Öztürk 1992, Güçlüsoy et al. 1999, Kompanje et al. 2000, Kiraç et al. 1998a, 2002, Salman et al. 2001, Güçlüsoy & Savas 2003b, Karamanlidis & Johnson 2002).
- In this, the third generation period, the current status of the species and its habitat are monitored more effectively. A case in point is SAD-AFAG's "FokData" monk seal data base, launched in 1990, which stores individual sighting records originating from throughout the coastal areas of Turkey (Kiraç et al. 1998a).

#### **II. Sustainable management of aquatic resources**

- Largely because of lobbying efforts by SAD-AFAG, METU-IMS, IU-FAP and others, some fisheries decisions of relevance to the monk seal have subsequently been taken in close cooperation with local fisheries cooperatives, particularly those at Foça and Aydıncık on the west Mersin coasts.
- A regulation banning entry into monk seal caves under any circumstances was incorporated into the government's 1991 Aqua Products Circular, following a proposal by SAD-AFAG during the first NMSC meeting in Ankara and subsequent adoption by the MoA.

- Banning beach-seines and coastal trawlers in the Foça SPA in 1992, following a proposal by the local fishermen of Foça, the Foça Municipality and SAD-AFAG.
- Banning beach-seines and other coastal trawler fishing techniques on all Turkish coasts (except for Ayvalik and vicinity), proposed by SAD-AFAG based on the study reports of the Fisheries Faculty of Aegean University and the experience gained from the FPP in 1999; approved by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2001.
- Banning harpoon fishing of dusky grouper (*Ephinephelus guaza*) and dog tooth grouper (*E. caninus*) in Turkey, proposed by SAD-AFAG in 2002 and approved by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in 2002, to the benefit of the species and artisanal fishermen.
- “No fishing zones” established in Kizilliman and Melleç in Mersin, and Mordogan in Izmir, in order to keep fishing away from important monk seal breeding caves. The proposals provided by SAD-AFAG and METU-IMS, in joint action and in consensus with artisanal fishermen, were subsequently adopted by the MoA.
- The establishment of marine guarding systems in two protected areas, Foça (donated by MoE) and Aydıncık (by AFAG), with the use of patrol boats operated by local government and stakeholders, including fishing cooperatives and municipalities.
- Involvement of artisanal fishermen in conservation, through actions such as the “Artisanal Fisheries Symposium” held by SAD-AFAG and Dokuz Eylül University in 1999, and the strengthening of artisanal fishing cooperatives in Foça, Karaburun and Aydıncık via financial and equipment support by SAD-AFAG in 2002 and 2003.

### III. Conservation: protected areas and sustainable management plans

Concrete steps and achievements made during the third generation conservation period (since 1987) include:

- A coastal zone and adjacent marine area zonation plan for the “Foça Monk Seal and Sea Protection Area” (Aslan cape to Deveboynu cape), prepared and submitted to the MoE by SAD-AFAG in 2003.
- The declaration of five coastal areas as 1st degree protected areas (SIT) along the west Mersin coast, totalling some 70 km. Proposed by METU-IMS in 1998 and adopted by the Ministry of Culture (MoC) [see [Regional News](#), TMG 1 (2): December 1998].
- The declaration of Kūdūr Peninsula (near Bodrum) as a 1st degree protected area (SIT), proposed by SAD-AFAG in 1999, and subsequently adopted by the MoE and Ministry of Culture (MoC) [see [Mediterranean News](#), TMG 2 (1): May 1999].
- Regulating navigation around the Ayvalik islands, Foça islands and Bodrum Peninsula and adjacent islands. Ships greater than 300 GT and ships with all tonnages carrying hazardous cargo will no longer be permitted to navigate between the mainland and adjacent islands so as to ensure safety of navigation, life and environment. The SAD-AFAG proposal was adopted in 2001 by the Undersecretariat for Maritime Affairs and implemented by the Department of Oceanography and Navigation.
- SAD-AFAG supported the MoC in providing habitat data for a court case against an investor attempting to construct a hotel in Gökgemile bay near Fethiye — a 1st degree protected area (SIT) and also an important monk seal site. The MoC won the court case in 1999. Similarly, various illegal coastal zone developments have been investigated by SAD-AFAG.
- As a result of research studies by SAD-AFAG, METU-IMS and IU-FAP, 12 Important Monk Seal Sites in Turkey were identified and subsequently proposed to the NMSC as protected areas in 1998 [see [Endgame: the fight for marine protected areas in Turkey](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002].
- In May 2004, the Turkish government publicly pledged to establish permanent protection status for 5 Important Monk Seal Sites of the 12 originally recommended [see [Turkish government pledges 5 new protected areas for the Monk Seal](#), TMG 7 (1): June 2004].
- In 2000, during a study considering revisions to the extensive “no diving zones” under MoC regulations, SAD-AFAG proposed continuation of diving restrictions in seal-critical areas. Persuaded by SAD-AFAG’s case, the MoC subsequently agreed to announce further *new* “no diving zones” on certain coasts.

#### IV. Public awareness and lobbying activities

- During the third generation period, decision makers, universities and academics, the press and media, and the general public have been widely informed about the monk seal in Turkey, the threats facing it, and measures necessary to prevent its extinction.
- On the formal education level, SAD-AFAG, METU-IMS and IU-FAP have undertaken education programmes in selected high schools, primary schools and universities nationwide.
- Threat factors against the species and its habitats have been clearly identified and published (Savas 1999, Güçlüsoy & Savas 2003a, Kiraç et al. 1998b) and reported to relevant ministries, local governors and mayors for corrective actions to be taken.

#### V. Others

- At Çavus Island near Bodrum, an oil spill clean-up operation was launched and successfully completed by SAD-AFAG in 1997 to save monk seal habitats. The operation, aided by local people, collected 137 tons of oil waste [see [Oil Spill At Çavus Island](#), TMG 1 (1): May 1998].

### WEAKNESSES

- Lack of coastal zone management planning in protected areas, especially within the 5 top-priority Important Monk Seal Sites of Turkey — this in spite of the considerable knowledge already available on abundance and distribution of the species, and the threats facing it, within these areas.
- Lack of any adequate protection within the remainder of the 12 Important Monk Seal Sites in Turkey, identified and subsequently recommended to the NMSC as protected areas in 1998.
- Insufficient coordination, cooperation and consensus within the NMSC under the control of MoE. Lack of effective collaboration and cooperation between GOs and NGOs.
- Inadequate patrolling and inspection of coastal National Parks, Specially Protected Areas and SIT areas, as well as Important Monk Seal Sites. Illegal activities continue to undermine the quality of these habitats and disturb the species. A lack of qualified personnel compounds the problem.
- The extinction of the monk seal in the Black Sea, while the authorities stood by, witnessing this inexorable process without taking any meaningful action to halt it.
- Difficulty in achieving effective collaboration among conservationists and universities; the tendency to act as individual organizations rather than as a coordinated unit or coalition.
- Local Monk Seal Committees have shown little sign of functioning adequately on their own, with the exception of the Foça LMSC.
- Funding remains erratic and in chronically short-supply, hampering monk seal research and conservation efforts and hindering longer-term planning.

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## DEVELOPING CLOSER TIES BETWEEN TURKEY AND GREECE IN MONK SEAL CONSERVATION

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With the financial support of the EC, cooperation between NGOs in Turkey and Greece is gradually developing better monk seal conservation practices in both countries – which together host the largest surviving populations of the species. [MOM](#) in Greece and [SAD-AFAG](#) in Turkey, both leading organizations in monk seal protection and research in their respective countries, believe that effective conservation of the species and its habitat will remain limited if a functional cooperation cannot be achieved in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Cooperation between the two NGOs began in 2000 with the support of the Greek Ministry of Environment, following the “spring thaw” in relations pursued by politicians on both sides of the Aegean after many years of high political tensions. Previously, the members of SAD-AFAG and MOM only had the rare opportunity of communicating with each other during international meetings.

Turkey’s intention to pursue EU membership has also fostered a better political climate with Greece, a member state, while Greece itself has also opened the door to its neighbour in the interests of improved relations and civic dialogue.

The first instrument provided to Turkey by EC / DG Environment was under “*Projects to Promote the Capacity of NGOs in Malta, Cyprus and Turkey, Through Twinning and Exchange Activities*” This operates under the PHARE 2003 multi-country programme on environment and enlargement, with the aim of improving the capacity of NGOs to play their full role in the implementation of the EU environmental acquis (the environment-related body of common rights and obligations which bind all the Member States together within the European Union) in their respective countries. Central to this aim is the transfer of best practice know-how from EU NGOs to NGOs in target countries. Through the programme, SAD-AFAG carried out a twinning project with MOM, for six months between January and June 2004. With the participation of 4 SAD-AFAG and 8 MOM staff members, a workshop and an evaluation meeting were held at MOM’s head office in Athens. At these meetings, the administrative and financial management methods used by MOM and SAD-AFAG in various conservation situations were compared. The EU acquis on environment protection and MOM’s experience within it, were also discussed.



Alonissos: Greek and Turkish fishermen exchange experiences

The EC Delegation in Turkey provided the follow-up opportunity to strengthen the cooperation between NGOs from Turkey and Greece, with “*The Micro Project Program for Turkish – Greek Civic Dialogue*”. SAD-AFAG received approval under this programme for the project “*A comparison and experience exchange between the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS) (Greece) and the Foça Specially Protected Area (FSPA)(Turkey) involving the NGOs MOM and SAD-AFAG*”.

This project, implemented in cooperation with MOm, focuses on experience exchange, and seeks to encourage dialogue between the pioneer monk seal conservation areas of both countries. The exchange will draw upon more than 10 years of both practical and theoretical experience obtained by the two NGOs, with fishing cooperatives and protected area management bodies being a high priority for study. The project will run for nine months between March and December 2004.

The cooperative project called for two workshops to be held in Foça and Alonissos, and also a separate evaluation meeting in Foça. The Alonissos workshop took place in July 2004, and the Foça workshop in early September. The concluding evaluation meeting was held in Foça at the end of October.

During these workshops, participants discussed the geographic, demographic and economic aspects of Foça and Alonissos; legal tools for nature conservation in Greece and Turkey, including Natura 2000 experience in Greece; fisheries management in both countries, with an emphasis on Foça and Alonissos; the multiple aspects of the Foça and Alonissos marine protected areas, and the status and distribution of the monk seal in these MPAs. The workshop participants included representatives of SAD-AFAG and MOm and their respective staff members based in Alonissos and Foça, the Mayor of Alonissos, officers from the Foça Municipality, an expert from the Turkish Ministry of the Environment and Forests / Authority for the Specially Protected Areas, the presidents of the Alonissos and Foça fishing cooperatives, the vice-president of the Alonissos fishing cooperative, the president of the Alonissos fishing association, and a founder member of the Foça fishing cooperative.



Greek and Turkish project participants visiting the mayor of Foça, Gokhan Demirag (second from right, back row), including the mayor of Alonissos, Orestis Papachristou (third from right, back row)

Perhaps the most significant element of this project was the inclusion of local fishermen and the responsible staff of the municipalities. Turkish and Greek fishermen from Foça and Alonissos, who have experienced monk seal conservation firsthand for more than 10 years simultaneously, and who are currently supporting such conservation initiatives, met for the first time ever.

**"Sharing common problems but also dreams, our two communities, Alonissos and Foça, are strongly trying to develop, following the principals of sustainable use of natural resources. I believe that collaborative initiatives between the two communities will lead us faster towards a safer and better future for our communities' citizens and their children."**

**– Orestis Papachristou, Mayor of Alonissos.**

In getting to know each other, and in discussing various fisheries issues, the fishermen realised that they shared similar fisheries problems. As a result, they steered a more or less parallel route when discussing monk seal protection in their areas, and the real and potential benefits that can be accrued from it. The mayors of Alonissos and Foça declared that their communities had also benefited from seal conservation, and that it was important for the future of fisheries and the quality of life in Alonissos and Foça generally, since both are dependent upon the health and integrity of the natural environment.

The second workshop in Foça was scheduled to overlap with the IV Rastgele International Fisheries and Sea Documentaries Festival held on 1-5 September 2004. The fishermen from Alonissos competed with the fishermen of Foça in hook tying and net mending contests with

obvious enjoyment and goodwill. During the last day of the Festival, workshop participants took centre stage as speakers in the panel discussion “After 10 Years of Experience, Fisheries and Monk Seal Protection in Foça and Alonissos”. The panel’s main conclusion was that neither the fishermen nor the mayors would like to turn back to pre-protection days in Alonissos and Foça, and they were ready to further relations developed by this project by increasing their level of cooperation in the future.



Greek and Turkish fishermen compete in the Foça Festival net-mending contest



Turkish-Greek panel discussion within the ancient walls of Foça

MOM and SAD-AFAG, finding these reactions more than encouraging, have since decided to pursue projects and seek further funds to develop the relations between the fisheries cooperatives and the municipalities of Foça and Alonissos.

The EC Delegation in Turkey opened the second phase of “*The Micro Project Programme for Turkish – Greek Civic Dialogue*” in 2004, and this time MOM was awarded the project “*The Mediterranean monk seal: Confronting emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean through exchange of know-how and network building*”, to be carried out with SAD-AFAG from July 2004 to July 2005.

This project aims to:

- Develop a methodology to successfully deal with emergency cases of sick, injured and orphaned monk seals in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Establish a Monk Seal Information Network in Turkey.
- Develop an agreement on an operational basis on how to react in case of an environmental disaster or mass mortality event (infectious diseases within the monk seal populations, oil spills, etc.) in either part of the Aegean, affecting one or both countries.

In addition, the project aims to promote joint/complementary methodology in the work of the two environmental NGOs (MOM and SAD-AFAG), in order to:

- Increase the survival possibilities of the species in the Eastern Mediterranean by operating according to adjusted protocols in each country on rescuing animals in need and on conducting necropsies.
- Enhance awareness among the local public and of key stakeholders in both countries on the endangered status of the species, the reasons for its decline and the uniqueness of the existence of the monk seal in their area, in order to encourage pro-conservation attitudes and direct involvement in conservation efforts.

The start-up meeting of the project was originally planned for October in Foça but it has since been postponed due to the rescue of orphaned monk seal pup “Hippocrates” on Kos, Greece [See [Greeks and Turks join forces in rescue project](#), this issue].

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## In Focus

Vol. 7 (2): November 2004

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### IS THE BROKEN LINK BETWEEN TWO ISOLATED COLONIES IN THE NORTHEASTERN MEDITERRANEAN RE-ESTABLISHING?

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Last year, a research project was initiated jointly by Middle East Technical University Institute of Marine Sciences and the BTC Co Pipeline Company Environmental Investment Program to study the Mediterranean monk seal in the Gulf of Iskenderun [see [Perspectives](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003]. Lately, a seal sighted within the study area moved beyond the anticipated migration limits [see [Arab the Pilgrim](#), TMG 7 (1): June 2004], thus demonstrating that to study the seals solely within such a confined area would provide only a tiny fragment of a large picture. The area covered by the study has therefore been increased to incorporate the seal colony on the west coast of Mersin, which is less than 200 km away.

This year in autumn, prior to conducting a field trip to the Gulf of Iskenderun, an additional survey was carried out on the Cilician coast. The main target of the surveys was to find evidence of the journey of Arab “the pilgrim”, a male seal frequently sighted in the Gulf, so as to understand the links between the colony on west coast of Mersin (Cilician coast) and the seals sighted in the Gulf of Iskenderun.

The research team had 5 tasks in the survey: i) checking all seal habitats (mainly caves) known in the area; ii) sailing along the transects in search of seals; iii) exploring new habitats; iv) collecting images via in-cave camera traps and v) collecting recent seal sighting information from the locals on either side of the study area.

A total of 39 caves, including 4 in which at least a pup was found by the research team earlier, were checked in the survey. Although fresh haul-out trails conspicuously signified active use in all breeding caves, whelping occurred only in a single cave, which had not been used for breeding until last year (see [The Cilician Monk Seal Colony is Growing](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003). Since the breeding season in the Cilician colony may extend to mid-November (Gucu et al. 2004), the timing of the survey might have been premature, and there may still be hope of finding more recruits to the colony during the coming survey in late November 2004.

As yet, the infrared camera traps in the Gulf failed to catch Arab. Moreover, he did not show up during the survey on the west coast of Mersin. Instead, a young female, displaying rather few mating scars on her back, was sighted during the observation in an area designated ‘abandoned seal habitat’ located between Cilicia and the Gulf of Iskenderun. The brief survey on this coast indicated that a cave which had not been used in the last 10 years, and hence recorded as



Survey areas circled in red. Left: the Cilician coast. Right: the Gulf of Iskenderun. Red dots mark the location of formerly abandoned and recently re-populated caves.

“abandoned” in the cave inventory, has since been frequented at least by the young female. This is, in fact, one of two caves found to be in use by the seals, though both were known as “abandoned” before the survey. Both caves are located outside the colony’s distribution site described earlier (Gucu et al. 2004).

Furthermore, the female seal sighted in the area was seen to make suspiciously slow movements, especially when diving. Her bloated belly, recognized in the inspection of underwater images, allows us to hope that she might be pregnant.

In the first habitat exploration survey carried out in the Gulf of Iskenderun in October 2003, none of the caves discovered had appropriate characteristics for whelping, such as a wide and long platform in a well sheltered air chamber having a calm inner training pool. Lack of a proper breeding cave was one of the reasons that led us to the premature conclusion that the area might never have hosted a large, resident and isolated seal colony. In the last field survey, however, a cave having suitable characteristics for breeding was finally discovered and obliged us to reconsider our conclusion.



A young female seal caught by the in-cave camera trap. So far, Arab “the Pilgrim” has not been caught on camera.

Besides, the seal sighting reports accumulated through the information network established among the locals have indicated that the occurrence of seals within the Gulf of Iskenderun is not sporadic as thought earlier, but covers the whole year. That may also indicate existence of a small segregated group of seals inhabiting the Gulf. The number of sightings, however, is not high enough to expect a large colony in the region.

It is very likely that there was one single and large seal population in the past covering the entire extent of the northeastern Mediterranean. Later, because of intensive urbanization and industrialization within their habitat, and also because of deliberate killings, the population became fragmented into small isolated colonies by the early 1980s. Today, the seals dispersed to Syria, Cyprus, the Gulf of Iskenderun and all along the northeastern Mediterranean may be the relicts of the same historical population. Depending on the level of disturbance and the size of the fragments, some groups may maintain their biological and social functions, as on the Cilician coast. Due to steep and mountainous topography on the west coast of Mersin, human pressure and, in turn, habitat fragmentation, has not been as severe as on the east coast, as indicated by continued reproductive ability of the colony inhabiting there. However, the fate of the small colony in the Gulf of Iskenderun is uncertain, especially when the genetic bottleneck is considered — i.e. the probability of extinction may increase due to reduced genetic variability.

The evaluation of survey results, however, reveals that the situation in the eastern Mediterranean is not as bad as first feared — and may even be promising. It is evident that the colony on the west coast of Mersin is increasing, and is also following an expanding trend. The caves recently repopulated by the seals are located right in the middle of the two fragmented colonies. At the moment we are not sure if there is sufficient genetic movement between these fragments. However, if the young female breeds in these caves and establishes a new family (= sub-group) in the area, that will certainly be a bridge between two isolated colonies. In fact, it seems that this is the only chance of the small colony in the Gulf of Iskenderun to survive.

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## Perspectives

Vol. 7 (2): November 2004

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### **MONK SEAL CONSERVATION “UNVEILED”**

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Anyone who has had the opportunity of studying a scientific article on the Mediterranean monk seal or even of scrolling through the electronic pages of *The Monachus Guardian*, will have come across the names Monod, Mursaloglu, Marchessaux, Ronald, Berkes etc. Names that make up the pantheon of monk seal conservation, and belong to people who helped lift *Monachus monachus* out of scientific anonymity and initiated the first coordinated efforts to study and protect this endangered species.

Despite using sometimes rather unconventional methods (monk seal surveys by helicopter are not that popular nowadays), one of their greatest merits was that they inspired other, younger scientists and conservationists to carry on with the monk seal mission. With most members of the old guard now enjoying a well-deserved retirement (wherever that might be), their successors are trying to save the Mediterranean monk seal in places such as Madeira and Mauritania, Greece and Turkey.

But who are these people? Are they the “ecologist freaks” who release hundreds of seals into the sea and are responsible for the ever dwindling fish resources? Are they the ones who oppose every kind of coastal and marine development in order to make the life of coastal inhabitants even more difficult than it already is? A glimpse into the lives of four of these people tries to shed some light and dispel some of the myths concerning *Homo monachus*; a species almost as rare and endangered as the species in question itself.

**Rosa Pires (1970), Biologist, M.Sc. in Conservation Biology; member of the research personnel of the Madeira Natural Park Service. Main research interests: conservation of the Mediterranean monk seal and management of the protected areas of Ponta de São Lourenço and Desertas Islands.**

**How did you first get involved studying/protecting the monk seal? Who brought you into the “scene”?**

I was introduced into the monk seal “scene” by Henrique Costa Neves, the director of Parque Natural da Madeira, whilst carrying out my undergraduate thesis. A short while after, I received a position at the Park as a ranger and later on as a biologist.

**Describe the part of your job you like most/least.**

I love working in the field; I hate working too much in the office.



**Has the job over the years become better/easier etc, and if so, how?**

With the years, my job has become unfortunately more boring, as it involves more work in the office and less work in the field.

**Share with us your best, worst and quirkiest encounter/experience during your job.**

My best experience was in December 1997 when we reunited a rescued pup and her mother. My most terrifying experience was in the same season, while leaving a lookout-site from where I had been observing two females fighting over a pup. As the sea was very rough I had to swim to the approaching inflatable of the Park Service in order to return home. However, my presence was noticed by one of the females, which charged into the water in the direction of the inflatable in a really bad temper while vocalizing loudly. After she returned to rest on land I decided to make a run for it... Despite their usually peaceful manner, I felt like swimming in... JAWS!

**If not protecting Mediterranean monk seals, what other animal/plant would you like to be working with?**

I would like to work in general in the marine environment. If not with monk seals, then perhaps with Dugongs or Manatees.

**What special skills does a monk seal specialist need in order to be good in their job?**

Working for the monk seal “cause” is a tough job! One has to be dynamic, persistent and determined. One must have also good communication skills in order to influence the people who will make a difference in the monk seal’s fate.

**Give us reasons why somebody should follow in your footsteps?**

We are succeeding. Monk seals in Madeira are increasing and this is a wonderful feeling!

**What is your prediction about the future of the monk seals in your area of concern and for the species in general?**

It is practically impossible to make a reliable prediction about the future of this species, but I believe that in Madeira the population has a fairly good chance of survival. Concerning the species in general and taking into account that most of the populations are still facing many threats, it’s urgent to implement effective conservation programmes.

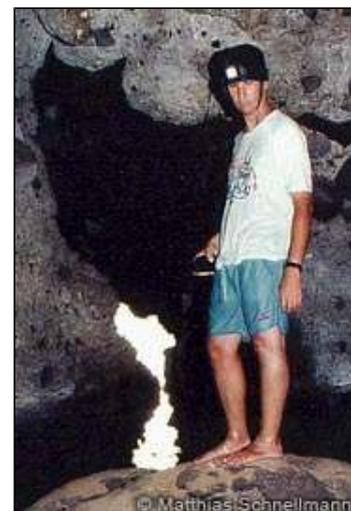
**Which is currently the biggest challenge in your work?**

Our biggest challenge in Madeira is to monitor effectively our monk seal population, which is expanding both in size and distribution.

**Harun Güçlüsoy (1972), Biologist, Ph.D. candidate, Research Assistant at the Dokuz Eylül University – Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology, Board Member of SAD-AFAG. Main research interests: management of MPAs, competitive interactions of monk seals and fisheries, life history of *Monachus monachus*.**

**How did you first get involved studying/protecting the monk seal? Who brought you into the “scene”?**

My first encounter with the species was in 1988 when I found a stranded juvenile on a beach at Ardiç, at the Karaburun Peninsula. My actual involvement however came very much by chance in 1990, when I wanted to learn how to scuba dive and became a member of the Middle East Technical University – Sub Aqua Society and AFAG. Many thanks to Cem Kirac and Yalcin Savas who helped me “dive” into the monk seal issue.



**Describe the part of your job you like most/least.**

The best part of the job is sitting on the top of the Siren Rocks (especially during sunset) in the Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area (PMSCA), waiting to observe monk seals. This may sometimes seem endless and the scurrying winds and whistling shags and sea gulls might drive you nuts, but it is certainly ten times better than sitting in the office and dealing with nagging pseudo, semi-professional fishermen.

**Has the job over the years become better/easier etc, and if so, how?**

It has become more bureaucratic! At the beginning, it was all about collecting data in the field and lobbying for the cause. Now, with the first results in hand, these have to be turned into a sound management policy, which in turn means simply more paper work and talks with decision makers!

**Share with us your best, worst and quirkiest encounter/experience during your job.**

The best experience was when I heard the inarticulate “quaackkk” of the pup Derya. A squeak that was the beginning of a series of breeding events in the Foça PMSCA, just two years after placing the area under protection. The worst one, on the other hand, was when we found Bahtiye, the second pup of the Foça PMSCA, stranded on a beach when she was only four months old. The quirkiest one has to be the establishment of the core zone of the Foça PMSCA; it took less than a year to convince local and national GOs to accept our proposal.

**If not protecting Mediterranean monk seals, what other animal/plant would you like to be working with?**

Whales and dolphins; in any way, a member of the aquatic flora or fauna.

**What special skills does a monk seal specialist need in order to be good in their job?**

Patience, patience, and... patience. Patience while waiting to catch a glimpse of a monk seal, while trying to be understood by the locals and especially the fishermen, and finally, patience again, while waiting to see the results (if any) of one's actions.

**Give us the reasons why somebody should follow your footsteps?**

She/he must be crazy! However, if one can find satisfaction in being often alone, and knowing that every helping hand is needed and DOES make a difference (for monk seals and humans alike) they should certainly follow our footsteps.

**What is your prediction about the future of the monk seals in your area of concern and for the species in general?**

I guess that if the entanglements of recently weaned pups continues, the species will not have a big chance of survival in this part of the Aegean Sea. However, since the species can travel long distances, emigration of others may keep the species in the Foça PMSCA afloat. I am optimistic for the survival of the species in general, since there are still suitable habitats. The “only” thing needed is good protection/management in existing and future key monk seal habitats.

**What is currently the biggest challenge in your work?**

The main problem is lack of funding and the lack of management plans and their implementation in key areas.

**Eleni Tounta (1959), Biologist, researcher of MOm/The Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal. Main research interest: ecology and life history of the Mediterranean monk seal and management of the National Marine Park of Alonnisos and Northern Sporades.**



**How did you first get involved studying/protecting the monk seal? Who brought you into the “scene”?**

My first contact with the species came in 1986 when the research group of the University of Athens, under the leadership of Prof. Matsakis, was looking for volunteers to create an inventory of the Hellenic fauna. Together with other members of the research team working back then on the monk seal, we founded the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Mediterranean monk seal in 1988.

**Describe the part of your job you like most/least.**

I enjoy working in the field and truly love the close contact to the animals. After all these years however, I still can not get a taste for working in the office.

**Has the job over the years become better/easier etc, and if so, how?**

The job has certainly changed. The first thing that pops into my mind is the routine that has settled in after all these years. This has made life easier but also more interesting; aspects of the species' biology and behaviour, which I could not “see” in the past, reveal themselves now more easily and give lots of answers to the questions of the past.

**Share with us your best, worst and quirkiest encounter/experience during your job.**

The quirkiest moment is definitely the appearance of an injured seal wanting to rest in the sewage system of the island of Skiathos. The spot it chose was under... the National Bank of Greece!

**If not protecting Mediterranean monk seals, what other animal/plant would you like to be working with?**

Bears!

**What special skills does a monk seal specialist need in order to be good in their job?**

A good monk seal specialist is a committed, field work loving...water rat!

**Give us the reasons why somebody should follow in your footsteps?**

The slightly insane and the incurable romantics will find their satisfaction in the idea of helping save a truly endangered species.

**What is your prediction about the future of the monk seals in your area of concern and for the species in general?**

Considering the lack of public awareness of the plight of the species and the insufficient amount of habitat put aside for its protection, I am not too optimistic that population numbers will significantly recover in the near future. If we manage however to bypass these adversities, the monk seal case might not be a lost one.

**Which is currently the biggest challenge in your work?**

Undoubtedly, finding the goose that will lay the golden egg for the funding of the next project is a great challenge. In addition, coming through to the public and making them realise the problems facing the species, is a challenge that can never be underestimated.

**Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa Arcal (1973), Marine biologist, Coordinator of the CBD-Habitat Foundation team working on the conservation of the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony in Mauritania/western Sahara. Main research interests: establishment and management of well designed and effective terrestrial and marine protected areas, conservation of *Monachus monachus*.**



**How did you first get involved studying/protecting the monk seal? Who brought you into the “scene”?**

My acquaintance with the endangered Mediterranean monk seal did not start under the best omens. It was while on a sailing tour around the world during the height of the die-off back in 1997, that I received all the information concerning this tragic event and came to appreciate this magnificent species but also the tough work and devotion of the people trying to save it. Back in Spain, I volunteered to the Coordinator of the Spanish Monk Seal Project, Luis Mariano Gonzalez, and that’s how my seven year relationship with the species began.

**Describe the part of your job you like most/least.**

Without doubt, the part I like the least is the constant search for funds in order to keep the work going. On the other hand, I can not stop smiling when I see conservation actions bearing fruits; especially the ones that affect the lives of humans, such as artisanal fishermen, who are a key component in the recovery of the species.

**Has the job over the years become better/easier etc, and if so, how?**

Over the years work has become more productive and pleasant due to the better collaboration of all the agencies involved in the conservation of the species. However, working in a mined military zone such as the one at the Cabo Blanco region is never easy.

**Share with us your best, worst and quirkiest encounter/experience during your job.**

Undeniably, one of the best moments of my job was when I first boarded one of the fragile artisanal pirogues and went out fishing in the proximity of the Cabo Blanco colony. Despite the constant fear of being crushed like a fly against the cliffs, this was the beginning of a very productive relationship, which has now resulted in the establishment of a no-fishing zone around the monk seal breeding caves. One of the worst moments was the recent news of the killing of Weam, a rescued, rehabilitated and released seal. Her death, which occurred outside the protected area, showed us the fragility of the actions for the conservation of this species and stressed the necessity of increasing the effort to better protect the species and set aside enough habitat for it.

**If not protecting Mediterranean monk seals, what other animal/plant would you like to be working with?**

As long as the work was at sea, any other marine organism would do.

**What special skills does a monk seal “freak” need in order to be good in their job?**

I guess the virtues of a good monk seal “freak”, at least in Cabo Blanco, lies in his commitment to the cause, the ability to constantly make sacrifices and the realisation that monk seal conservation is a job far away from the spotlight.

**Give us the reasons why somebody should follow your footsteps?**

Fighting for a just cause, meeting incredible people, places and species, and hoping to have given a helping hand to a species reaching out for your help. Not enough?

**What is your prediction about the future of the monk seals in your area of concern and for the species in general?**

I’m quite optimistic about the medium-term future of the Cabo Blanco colony. The implementation of an International Monk Seal Recovery Plan in the Atlantic Region, the progressive awareness of public authorities, the enforcement of more realistic fisheries

regulations and the establishment of marine protected areas in the region have all been steps in the right direction.

**What is currently the biggest challenge in your work?**

Our biggest challenge is how to deal in the future with the increasing human pressure from land and sea on the colony.

Looking back over the life, work and experiences of the four monk seal biologists, one must admit that this text will most probably not function as effective propaganda for attracting young biologists to the profession, nor help dispel some of the myths (?) concerning the “scene”. Also, it seems there is a certain amount of truth in the belief that *Homo monachus* is indeed a strange and rare species. How else can one explain the fact that, while all our interviewees lay the foundations of their knowledge in academia, they nevertheless chose to follow a direction within science that is often considered “academic suicide”? And why would anybody on Earth choose to spend endless hours in the sun, the cold and the boring office with such paltry wages? Is the constant search for funds and the effort invested in trying to persuade people to help just another “seal” worth the bother?

*Homo monachus* is indeed a rare and strange species. As the saying goes, however, extraordinary situations require extraordinary solutions. So, for all of you out there who think they are extraordinary enough... LINE UP!

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### CATALOGUE OF THE MONK SEALS IN THE FOÇA PILOT MONK SEAL CONSERVATION AREA, TURKEY, FROM 1993 TO 1999

Harun Güçlüsoy<sup>1,2</sup> and Yalçın Savas<sup>2</sup>

1. Dokuz Eylül University – Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology
2. Underwater Research Society-Mediterranean Seal Research Group (SAD-AFAG)

The critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) has been known to occur in Foça since early antiquity (Johnson & Lavigne 1999). During the last century, occurrence of the species at and around Foça was reported by Mursaloglu (1964) Berkes et al. (1979), Marchessaux (1987), Savas and Kiraç (1991), Öztürk and Dede (1995), and Güçlüsoy and Savas (2003). In 1991, Foça was selected as a Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area (PMSCA) in order to implement the National Strategy for the Conservation of the Monk Seal (Güçlüsoy & Savas 2003). The status and habitat use of the local monk seal population was described by Güçlüsoy and Savas (2003), who lived and worked in Foça between June 1993 and December 1998. However, although we listed identified monk seal individuals in that publication, we did not provide detailed descriptions. Because monk seals are relatively long-living (Marchessaux 1989) and have an estimated home range of 40 km (Berkes 1978) and 37-56 km (Gucu & Ok 2004), we believe it useful to make these detailed descriptions available to any researchers who may carry out future studies in this part of the Aegean Sea – including neighbouring Greek Islands, such as Chios. The identification data were collected during routine field surveys, involving monitoring of the area's 11 caves and observations from 39 selected points. Detailed description of the methodology is provided in Güçlüsoy and Savas (2003). The 9 monk seal individuals identified during the study period are as follows:

#### S1 Duygu:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

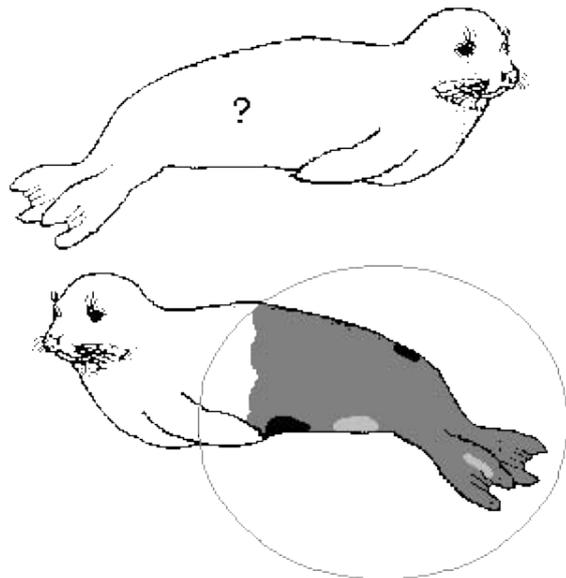
**Estimated length:** 210 – 240 cm

**Date of first observation:** 27.IV.1994

**Date of last observation:** 20.VI.1997

**Total Number of observations:** 13

**Special note:** She was observed twice with Disi Korsan (S2).



## S2 Disi Korsan:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

**Total length** (nose to extended rear flippers at necropsy): 210 cm

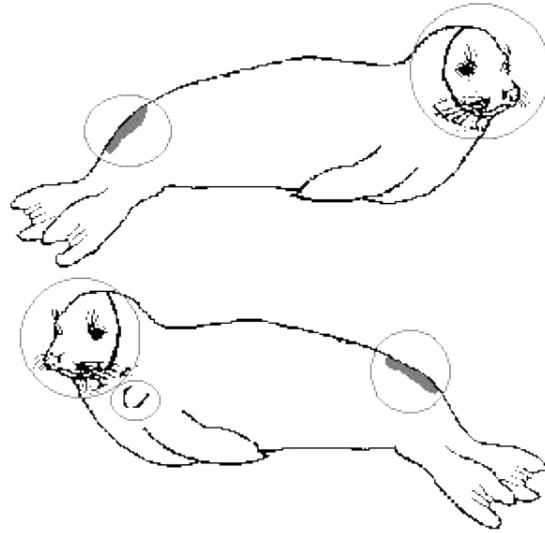
**Weight (at necropsy):** 152 kg

**Date of first observation:** 7.I.1995

**Date of last observation:** 4.IV.1998

**Total number of observations:** 44

**Special note:** Identification of this individual was facilitated because a rope was entangled around the seal's head. She was observed twice with Duygu (S1) and twice with both Emine (S8) and Bahtiyeye (S7). Prior to her death, she was found to be showing signs of illness in 5 sightings (2 from Yenifoça) between 24 January and 11 March 1998. Despite realising our presence during three cave checks of FÇ11, she did not attempt to escape, nor did she show any reaction to our presence. When found dead she was very emaciated and the vertebrae and rib bones were clearly visible. During necropsy, all teeth from the lower jaw and some from the upper jaw were found missing. Two small calibre shotgun pellets were discovered in the head and the upper left ventral zone, and two larger calibre pellets above the right eye. However, these were not the main cause of death. We found that a severe infection was the most probable cause of death, due to an unidentified disease. It is thought likely that the bullet wounds and the rope debris found cutting into her head caused general physical weakening, thus contributing to her death.



## S4 Sühendan:

**Sex:** Female

**Estimated length:** 220-250 cm

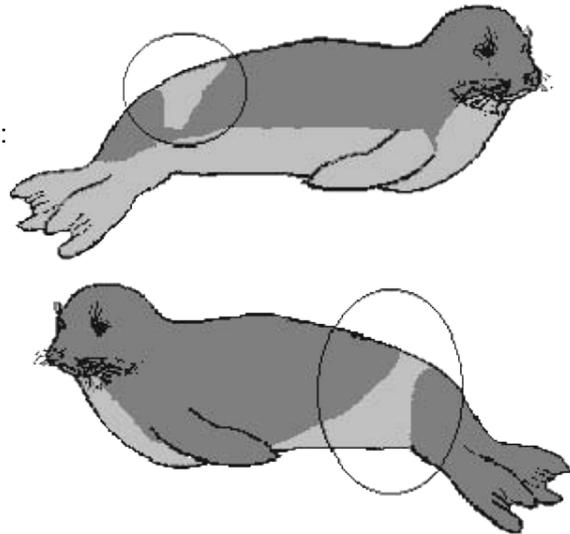
**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

**Date of first observation:** 18.X.1994

**Date of last observation:** 5.X.1995

**Total number of observations:** 5

**Special note:** She was observed once with Emine (S8).



### S5 Ilksen:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

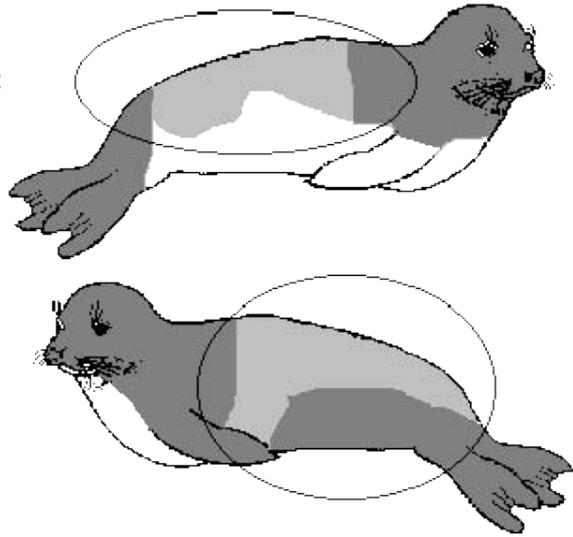
**Estimated length:** 200-230 cm

**Date of first observation:** 31.V.1995

**Date of last observation:** 13.IX.1996

**Total number of observations:** 6

**Special note:** She was one of the seals observed while hauling out on the western coast of Hayirsiz Island.



### S6 Marianne:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

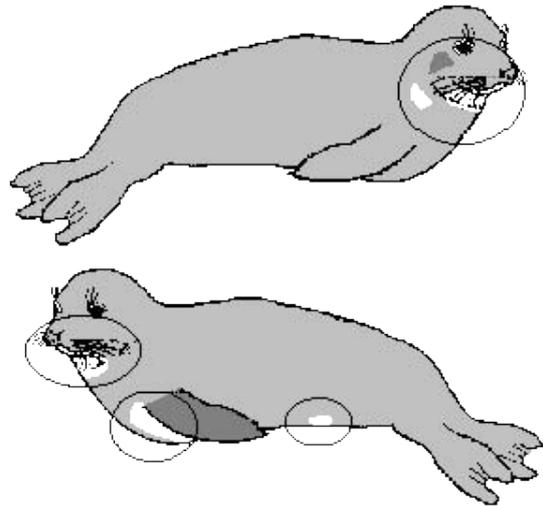
**Estimated length:** 210-240 cm

**Date of first observation:** 26.IV.1996

**Date of last observation:** 5.X.1997

**Total Number of observations:** 9

**Special note:** She was one of the seals observed while hauling out on the western coast of Hayirsiz Island.



### S7 Bahtiye:

**Sex:** Male

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Juvenile

**Total length** (nose to extended rear flippers at necropsy): 157 cm

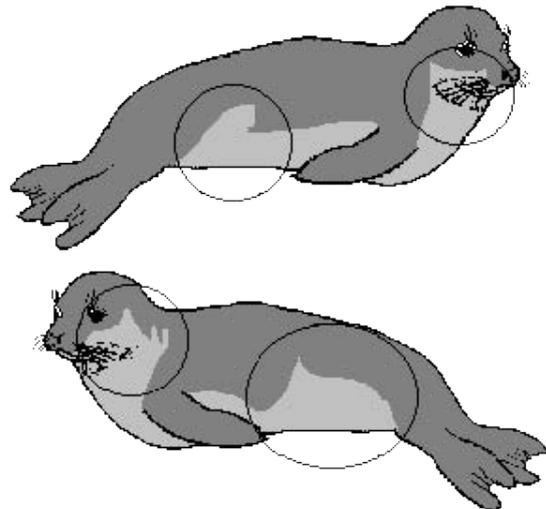
**Weight (at necropsy):** 39 kg

**Date of first observation:** 18.X.1996

**Date of last observation:** 10.II.1997

**Total number of observations:** 35

**Special notes:** He was born in the coastal cave (coded as FÇ02) situated in the Siren Rocks of Orak Island on 16 October 1996 and died when he was 117 days old. The cause of death was entanglement in a trammel net. He was observed 22 times with his mother Emine (S8), 4 times with his sister Derya (S9), twice with both Emine (S8) and Disi Korsan (S2) and once with Emine (S8) and Derya (S9).



### S8 Emine:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Large & medium grey seal

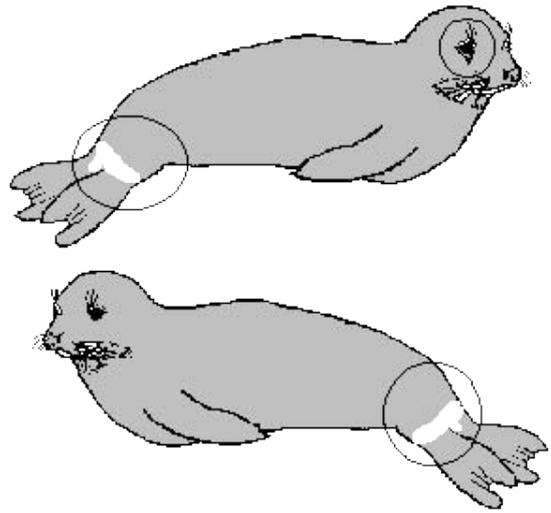
**Estimated length:** 210-240 cm

**Date of first observation:** 5.X.1995

**Date of last observation:** 26.IX.1998

**Total Number of observations:** 62

**Special notes:** She is the mother of Derya (S9) and Bahtiye (S7). She was observed 22 times with Bahtiye (S7), 18 times with Derya (S9), twice with Bahtiye (S7) and Disi Korsan (S2), once with Bahtiye (S7) and Derya (S9) and once with Sühendan (S4).



### S9 Derya:

**Sex:** Female

**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Juvenile

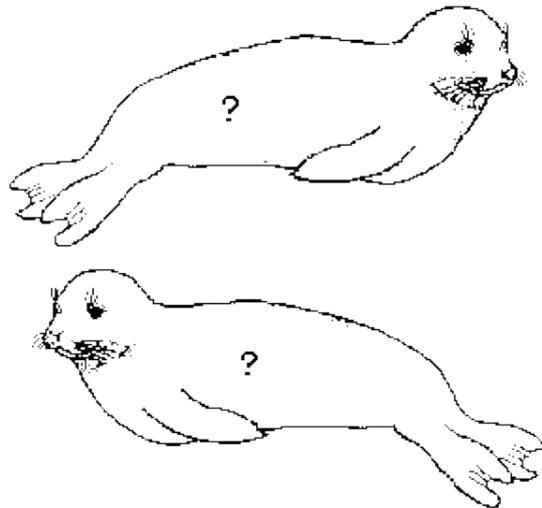
**Estimated length:** 150-180 cm

**Date of first observation:** 13.X.1995

**Date of last observation:** 22.I.1998

**Total number of observations:** 51

**Special notes:** She was born on 11 October 1995, and was found entangled in a trammel net like Bahtiye (S7) when 104 days old. However, the fishermen in whose net she was entangled, saved this seal. She has been observed 18 times with Emine (S8), 4 times with Bahtiye (S7) and once with Emine (S8) and Bahtiye (S7).



### S10 Fatma:

**Sex:** Female

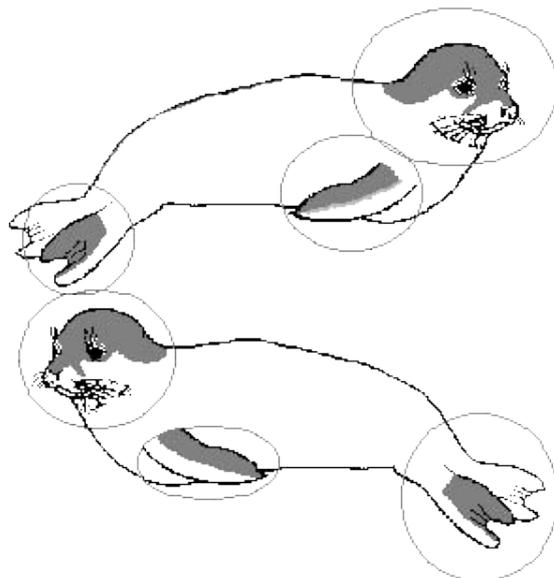
**Phenotype** (after Samaranch & Gonzales 2000):  
Juvenile

**Estimated length:** 150-180 cm

**Date of first observation:** 31.VII.1998

**Date of last observation:** 10.X.1998

**Total number of observations:** 9



## Discussion

During the study period – four and five years after the designation of the area as a PMSCA – when two pups Derya (S9) and Bahtiye (S7) were born and a juvenile, Fatma (S10) was observed, the area still served as an important monk seal breeding site. However, because the area is also an intensively exploited artisanal fishing ground, both pups were subsequently entangled in trammel nets. The same threat was also observed in two pups born on the western coasts of the Gulf of Izmir on the Karaburun Peninsula (Veryeri et al. 2001).

Although we did not hear or receive any report of the shooting of seals in the PMSCA, the discovery of shotgun pellets in the corpse of Disi Korsan (S2) indicates that direct killing remains a threat within the home range of the population.

Because this home range is likely to be greater than the area covered by the Foça PMSCA, attempts should be made to determine its extent, with a view towards expanding protection measures, including zonation and guarding efforts.

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## Letters to the Editor

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Vol. 7 (2): November 2004

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### Seal sighting on Alonissos

While sailing off Mourtia Bay, Alonissos [Greece] on Monday 21 June 2004, we saw an injured seal on the beach. We reported this to "Sunsail", our yacht charter company who telephoned the coastguard. The sanctuary [Monk Seal Rescue & Rehabilitation Centre] at Steni Vala was also contacted.



I would very much like to know if you found the seal, and if so how it is.

Is there any way we can help the sanctuary? We have visited Alonissos and Steni Vala many times and are keen to help.

– Jill and Miles Butler, U.K.

#### ✓ Editor's reply:

The seal you observed near Mourtia is well known to MOm (Hellenic Society for the Study & Protection of the Monk Seal) researchers on Alonissos; I believe he was first sighted hauling out on a beach near Votsi in September 2003. He had sustained wounds to the rear flippers – a reasonably common injury amongst competing adult male monk seals. MOm researchers have since inspected the animal several times and have concluded that the wounds are healing of their own accord and do not require intervention. Sightings (such as yours) are followed up on a regular basis – and are, indeed, very important in the overall conservation of the species. As such, if you ever happen to spot another monk seal during one of your sailing trips, please don't hesitate to let us know.

We published a brief, illustrated, news item on the Mourtia seal in the June issue of TMG. [["Seal on Alonissos trades shyness for the beach"](#)]

You can read more about the monk seal in the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS) in various issues of TMG, particularly the Greek news section.

If you would like to help the conservation programme while on Alonissos, you should get in touch with [MOm](#), the organisation leading those efforts in the NMPANS, or visit the exhibition centre at the harbour front in Patitiri.

### Population data

I would be grateful if you could inform me about the development of the monk seal population at the Sporades Marine Park, Greece (especially the development of

animals' births and deaths per year). Could you please also refer me to the background studies from which the original figures originate (e.g. is it your own research or does it originate from other researchers/authors)?

– *Dr. Iosif Botetzagias*, Research Assistant, University of Patras, Greece.

✓ **Editor's reply:**

Data on monk seal births and deaths within the area of the NMPANS are part of a well-established and long-term research and monitoring programme implemented by [MOM](#) biologists. Summaries of findings are often published under the Greek section of TMG's Mediterranean News. More comprehensive reports are available from the Society.

## Orphaned pups in need

As a long-time founding member of the Kauai Monk Seal Watch Program, I am very interested in the process used to preserve the life of [orphaned monk seals] Hippocrates and Dimitris.

Can you direct me to a source for this information?

– *Donna Lee*, Kauai, Hawaii.

✓ **Editor's reply:**

We continue to publish news and updates on the rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned monk seals at MOM's intensive care station at Alonissos, Greece. Please check out our Greek news section for information on the recent rescue of seal pup "Hippocrates" on the eastern Aegean island of Kos, and on the post-release satellite tracking of orphaned seal "Dimitris".

More detailed scientific information on the development of pups undergoing rehabilitation can be found in the following poster publication:

**Androukaki, E., E. Fatsea, L. 't Hart, A.D.M.E. Osterhaus, E. Tounta, and S. Kotomatas.** 2002. [Growth and development of Mediterranean monk seal pups during rehabilitation](#). Monachus Science Posters. The Monachus Guardian 5 (1): May 2002.

The proceedings of the ECS seal rehabilitation workshop was also published on the Society's web site in 2003 [[Seal rehab proceedings published online](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003]. The reference is:

**Androukaki, E. and Y. Larondelle** (eds). 2003. [Seal rehabilitation in theory and practice workshop: protocols, techniques, cases](#). 16th Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society, 7 April 2002, Liege, Belgium.

**The editor reserves the right to edit letters for the sake of clarity and space**

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## Recent Publications

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### In Print

- ▮ **González, L.M.** 2004. Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). Up-date of the status and conservation progress. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. Twelfth Meeting of the CMS Scientific Council Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom, 31 March - 3 April 2004: 1-7. [[PDF](#)  153KB]
  - ▮ **Harting, A., J. Baker, and B. Becker.** 2004. Non-metrical digital photo-identification system for the Hawaiian monk seal. *Marine Mammal Science* 20 (4): 886-895.
  - ▮ **Johnson, W.M.** 2004. Monk seals in post-classical history. The role of the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) in European history and culture, from the fall of Rome to the 20th century. *Mededelingen* 39. Netherlands Commission for International Nature Protection, Leiden: 1-91, 31 figs. [[Abstract](#)]
- For ordering information, please contact:**  
Backhuys Publishers, Warmonderweg 80, NL-2341 KZ Leiden, The Netherlands.  
Email: [backhuys@euronet.nl](mailto:backhuys@euronet.nl).  
Retail Price: € 18.-
- 
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