



### **FINDINGS ON THE REPRODUCTIVE PARAMETERS OF THE ENDANGERED MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL, *MONACHUS MONACHUS*, AT THE DESERTAS ISLANDS – MADEIRA ARCHIPELAGO**

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The temporal distribution of births, weaning and mating, and the pup productivity and mortality are described for the Mediterranean monk seal, *Monachus monachus*, population at Desertas Islands. Data collected from 1989 to 2002 by direct observation without interference in seal activity through the monitoring programme developed by Natural Park of Madeira was used. Three caves (Tabaqueiro, Bufador and Lanço do Rico) and one beach (Tabaqueiro), all located at the South of Deserta Grande, are used for breeding, with Tabaqueiro being the main maternity cave. Thus, births at the Desertas have been occurring mainly in October/November, since 1999, an annual birth started also occurring in spring. Four reproducer females were identified, three of them being active. During the study period, gross production was 25 pups, with an increase from one to three annual births, and only three cases of mortality were detected, all involving pups. Apparently the weaning period occurs 4-5 months after birth. Mating can occur throughout the year, but its peak coincides with the weaning period. The difficulty in identifying and following the individuals of this small population does not currently allow defining of other breeding parameters. Nevertheless, the maintenance of the seal monitoring project may allow in the future the gathering of such information, crucial for the species' management.

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