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## Letters to the Editor

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### Pup catching plans draw fire

I still do not believe that the status of the monk seals is so grave as to warrant such extreme invasive action as advocated by RAC/SPA experts [[Mystery at RAC/SPA](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003]. Despite the justifications for pre-emptive pup catching highlighted by RAC/SPA, there are still natural habitats in a good state, including Cilica in Turkey, and the Northern Sporades and Kimolos in Greece.

There are also promising, and largely undeveloped areas that have yet to be studied in detail for monk seal presence, such as the Lycian coasts and the Datça Peninsula of Turkey.

As long as we remain uncertain about the status and viability of the species at such sites, we could not possibly advocate translocation.

In terms of results, we believe that *in situ* conservation will always prove more effective than invasive measures such as capture, translocation and captive breeding. Costs must also be considered: *in situ* conservation is normally far less expensive than the budgets demanded by complex capture and captivity schemes.



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Will compensation for damaged nets help overcome fishermen's traditional hostility to the monk seal?

If RAC/SPA really wants to take action in a short term, then first of all we have to complete field work to locate potential breeding caves of monk seals; these should then be monitored for at least two years to find out whether or not they are active.

In Turkey, we have been unable to pursue these priority actions due to insufficient funding. Apart from Greece and some scattered areas elsewhere, to date no other countries have taken such actions with respect to this important matter.

Where the RAC/SPA proposals are concerned, I also have the following specific comments:

- Ban use of trammel nets around monk seal caves:** Though I agree with the assumption that monk seals may be vulnerable to trammel nets, our current experience shows that gill nets are equally attracting the animals (Güçlüsoy, in prep.) [see [Snared and drowned](#), TMG 4 (1): May 2001]. Over the last decade, all the seals entangled in fishing nets in Foça were entangled in the floating rope of the gear. Therefore, serious consideration should be given to including gill nets in the recommendation. Another point is that if such areas are closed for fishing, how will the traditional fishermen be subsidized? If they have no alternative form of employment, how will they live? This is an issue of great importance, particularly in countries like Turkey where people live under high inflation and with very little wages. How, then, will this subsidy regime be created and be funded and administered by national governments or by the UN or similar

organizations? We should note that the protection of each breeding cave may need its own specific approach where fisheries are concerned, since problems vary from area to area.

2. **Calculations for net damage compensation:** Research shows that gill nets play a far more significant role in monk seal-fisheries interactions (at least in our experience in Turkey). As such, the fishermen using this type of gear should qualify for the compensation/subsidy scheme recommended by the RAC/SPA authors. During the 9-year study in Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area, though both gill and trammel nets are equally attracting monk seals, the financial damage inflicted by the monk seals to the gill nets are found to be larger over a night. The maximum financial damage was calculated at 350 USD for gill nets (due to their accumulated catches, mainly involving more aggregated living fish species like *Boops boops*) compared to 120 USD for trammel nets. Therefore, the compensation regime should also include artisanal fishermen using gill nets (Güçlüsoy, in prep). Therefore, the proposed 5% net compensation regime that only considers trammel nets requires revising. The implementation of such a compensation scheme will also be very difficult since it is exceedingly hard to arrive at a consensus about damages with the fishermen of any of the important monk seal sites. They will surely claim different losses than those actually inflicted by the seals, and demand compensation accordingly. This issue therefore requires very careful consideration. Compensation may be considered by indirect means, such as capacity building of the fishing co-operatives operating in the important monk seal sites.
3. **Fishermen and monk seal tourism.** Recent events have shown that there is a need to develop internationally recognised guidelines on tourism's impact on the monk seal – including ecotourism efforts that seek to benefit local communities and local fishermen. In certain countries, legislation prohibits fishermen from using their boats for tourism-related purposes. We at SAD-AFAG are currently attempting to persuade the Undersecretary of Maritime Affairs to allow artisanal fishermen to take amateur fishermen on fishing trips.
4. **Greater efforts to prosecute the killers of monk seals.** In Turkey, we are pursuing this matter vigorously. The RAC/SPA authors, in fact, have neglected to mention our recent efforts to bring marine fish farm operators to court for the killing of a seal [see [Alleged monk seal killers acquitted: case heads to Supreme Court](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003, and [Monk seal deaths](#), TMG 6 (1): June 2003]. The role of fish farms as a threat to the species is also ignored. Fish farms, however, involve heavy investment and their operators consequently have less tolerance towards damage by any marine creature, including the monk seal. In our last study we recommended bag-type anti-predator nets to shield fish farm enclosures from attack by hungry seals (Güçlüsoy & Savas, 2003).
5. **Cave disturbance:** In principle, I agree about imposing a ban on monk seal cave disturbance – but wouldn't this require advertising the location of those caves? Without adequate monitoring, the measure could prove not only unenforceable but dangerously counterproductive.

In conclusion, I hope RAC/SPA's next logical step will be to consult those who are actually working to study and protect monk seals on a daily basis. Only then are we likely to develop guidelines and specific action plans that we can all agree upon.

## References

**Güçlüsoy, H.** Interaction between monk seals *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) and artisanal fishery in the Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area, in prep.

**Güçlüsoy, H. & Y. Savas.** 2003. Interaction between monk seals *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) and marine fish farms in the Turkish Aegean and management of the problem. *Aquaculture Research*, 34: 777-783.

— *Harun Güçlüsoy*, Head of Communications, Underwater Research Society – Mediterranean Seal Research Group ([SAD-AFAG](#)), Foça, Turkey.

## Tourism, ecotourism and the monk seal

I am currently interested in the project that WWF and the Turkish NGO SAD-AFAG undertook to protect Mediterranean monk seals [see [Progress reported in coastal zones project](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002]. I have read about it on the website and thought the information was very useful. I was wondering if you can tell me how this project has helped on the tourism side.

Basically, do you have any indication that these areas of Foça, Karaburun, Aydıncık, Melleç and Kizilliman ever attracted tourists who abused fishing as activity? And, if that was the case, how was the project influenced as a result, and what positive changes were brought about in terms of tourism and tourists' activities?

– Anna Anderson

### ✓ Harun Güçlüsoy, Head of Communications at SAD-AFAG, replies:

During the EU-SMAP funded coastal zones management project, our main focus group was fishermen. We attempted to offer alternative income generating activities (mainly relating to tourism) for the small scale (artesanal) fisheries in these areas. However, we are still awaiting permission from the Under-secretariat of Maritime Affairs to enable fishermen to carry tourists on their fishing trips and/or to take amateur fishermen for fishing.

Despite the delay, we were able to make two test trials during the fishing festival organised in Foça – the only touristic town featuring in the 2002/2003 project [see [Fishy film documentaries in Foça](#), 6 (2): December 2003].

An encouraging number of people expressed interest in or joined the amateur fishing contest by hiring the boats of professional fishermen. This is our ultimate aim: to obtain official permission for the artisanal fishing cooperatives to rent out their members' boats to amateur fishermen and anglers.

For further information on monk seal and fisheries interactions, and tourism-related threats to *monachus*, please check out the following articles in The Monachus Guardian:

[Snared and drowned](#), TMG 4 (1): May 2001

[When Fishermen Save Seals](#), The Monachus Guardian 3 (1): May 2000.

[Mass Tourism and the Mediterranean Monk Seal](#), The Monachus Guardian 2 (2): November 1999.

## Population puzzle

I am a Wildlife and Fisheries Science major at Pennsylvania State University. I am doing a population dynamics paper on the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). I chose to do this because my father is Turkish and I frequently visit Turkey. I am having some trouble finding information regarding their current population numbers, their fertility rates, and their survival rates. If you could provide me with this information and any other information you have about the seals I would greatly appreciate it.

– Elif Sevgi Kaynak, Pennsylvania, USA

### ✓ Harun Güçlüsoy, Head of Communications at SAD-AFAG, replies:

For Mediterranean monk seal population numbers, I recommend you consult [The Numbers Game \(II\)](#) in the last issue of The Monachus Guardian. The article provides a country by country breakdown of current estimates and also some explanation of the difficulties involved in achieving them.

Since the population of *monachus* is very fragmented and the individuals very scattered, it is very difficult to give any overall fertility or survival rate for the species. I suggest you check the relevant literature focusing on the western Sahara and Mauritania population from 1994 up to present (especially those papers authored by Jaume Forcada). You may also search for publications by Dr. John Harwood and Sarah Durant on the population dynamics of *monachus*. In both of the above cases, a good place to start in the search for relevant papers would be the Karamanlidis & Johnson 2002 [Annotated Bibliography on Mediterranean monk seals \(\*Monachus monachus\*\)](#) [📄 366KB] available online in the [Monachus Library](#).

I also suggest you check other available material at [www.monachus-guardian.org](http://www.monachus-guardian.org), including the current and back issues of the journal, the contents of which can be searched by keyword online.

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

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