The Monachus Guardian
monachus / schauinslandi / tropicalis

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International News: Mystery at RAC/SPA – are pups more at risk from fishermen, developers… or nature managers?

Cover Story: Object of desire – A scientist examines a tiny lobster from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, where the interests of fishermen and ecology clash.

In Focus: Responding to treatment – a young seal finds refuge along the Cilician coasts of Turkey.

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Guest Editorial

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

SAVING SEALS AT MADEIRA… A PASSIONATE AFFAIR

Rosa Pires

It is just over 10 years ago now that I visited Madeira for the first time, to study the Mediterranean monk seal as part of my student training. At the time, I could not have imagined that this wonderful creature would "hook" me in Madeira for years to come. I was only a student looking for something exciting to study. But after my first stay at the Desertas Islands something changed.

It was a stay of 2 weeks, during which I was involved in all the procedures that are applied to protect and monitor the species. During those days I had an experience that I could never have dreamt about… I was really surprised by the magnificence of these seals in the wild and it was fantastic to join such an enthusiastic team dedicated to the monk seal cause.

I remember the first time that I saw a monk seal, well, actually there were two, probably a female and her pup. They were playing near the beach, and I got so excited that I even forgot to take any notes! It took me a while, but I can finally say I have now managed to control this!

The monitoring of the monk seal population is based on such observations. For that purpose there are lookout sites established around the islands, from where we can spend anything up to five hours waiting for the seals to appear. Sometimes the observation effort seems to be interminable – that's when we do not observe any seal at all. But when we make one single sighting, we think that all the time spent there has been worth it. And the person that comes to pick us up from the lookout sites by boat (all the observatories are reached from the sea) always knows if we have seen a monk seal or not before we even say a word, because the satisfaction or the disappointment is always there, written on our faces.

So many observations have been made over the years, but 1997 was definitely a remarkable year for us. It was that year we first saw monk seals on an open beach at the Desertas Islands and even around Madeira Island. The funny thing is that we used to joke about this possibility: "One day we'll see monk seals on these beaches," we used to say, or "one day they'll be so common that they'll return to Madeira again."

I can now say that 1997 was probably the period that I had the strongest emotions on the Desertas Islands, not only because of the fantastic observations we had and the things we learned, but also because of the risks we took just to observe the seals in any weather or at any time, even in very stormy seas. We maintained our observation, over several days, of two beach-loafing adult seals with a single pup. When we confirmed that both were females and were nursing the pup, we discovered, just a few yards away, an abandoned infant. It was clear to us that its chances of survival were close to nil, so we decided to act. We relocated the young animal, placing it at safe distance from the females, just within ear-shot. Then, we waited for several moments that seemed like hours, since we were so anxious. Suddenly, our "abandoned" pup cried out and, out of nowhere, a female answered and came closer. Mother and pup, reunited, nuzzled for a while and then the female started to feed her offspring – it was just perfect! I believe this episode to be one of the best examples describing the importance of monk seal monitoring for the safeguarding of the species.

It was also in 1997 that we first saw monk seals around Madeira Island, from where they had disappeared at the end of the 1980s. Now, occasional encounters between these animals and the locals are happening, and public reaction is generally very positive. But the presence of monk seals around Madeira also has another significance: Madeirans are now fully aware of their presence, and are much more concerned about their preservation. Today, people's attitudes towards the seal have changed, and our responsibility is that much greater.

These major achievements are the result of our conservation work at the Desertas Islands. Henrique Costa Neves, former Director of the Natural Park Service of Madeira, was responsible for its implementation. Protection *in situ*, monitoring without disturbance and public awareness were the main considerations of his strategy. Although Henrique is no longer responsible for the protection of the species, his philosophy is still in practice here, a philosophy that has proven a great success.

Rosa Pires, November 2003

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Obituary

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Discoverer of the Cabo Blanco Monk Seal Colony

Eugenio Morales Agacino, 1914 – 2002

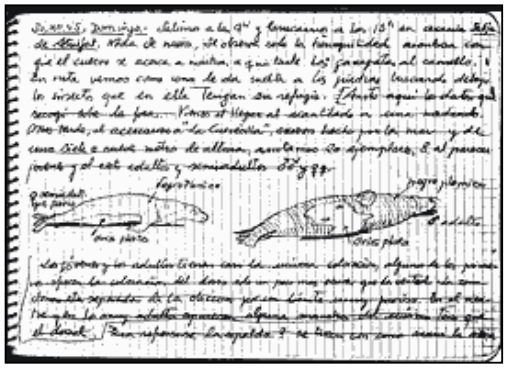
Scientific in the traditional way, a person of great culture and an excellent observer, D. Eugenio Morales Agacino (1914-2002) has been one of the greatest Spanish naturalists of the 20th century. His training at the Natural Science national Museum under the Direction of the renowned Ignacio Bolívar y Urrutia, marked his scientific evolution, as he often said. Fascinated by entomology since his youth, this was the branch of science to which he devoted a great part of his life. In this field, he described a great number of species and genres previously unknown to the scientific community. His contributions in the field of vertebrates were also of great importance and scientific relevance. In recognition of his life's work, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Autonomous University of Madrid in 1998.

Morales Agacino with a Hyena in the Spanish Sahara (western Sahara).

Attracted early on by Africa and especially by the desert, he began his adventures in those lands in 1932, undertaking several trips to Morocco in successive years. After the Spanish civil war, in which he suffered reprisals and was thrown into jail by the winners and losers alike, he was appointed by the Spanish government to study plagues of locusts in the Spanish Sahara. During these campaigns he produced numerous descriptions, not only of fauna – his primary endeavour – but also of matters of relevance to other branches of science, like local geography, ethnography, ancient stone engravings, folk tales of the Sahara etc., subjects where knowledge was very scarce at the time.

His most spectacular and important discovery took place during one of his campaigns through the desert. On 30 December 1945, he located the cave which holds the monk seal colony of "Las Cuevecillas" on the Cabo Blanco peninsula Coast.

The first known photograph of "Las Cuevecillas" monk seal colony, taken by Morales Agacino on 30 December 1945.



A page from Morales Agacino's field note book, recording his observations at "Las Cuevecillas".

Earlier, Théodore Monod had tried without success to find the same place, but had only observed individual seals at sea. On the day of his discovery, however, Morales Agacino was able to observe around twenty seals resting on the sand, in a group formed by pups and adults, as well as several animals swimming in the water. He could even describe many characteristics of the animals, publishing in 1950 an important article in *Mammalia* where he related the location of his discovery and the observations he conducted. This same place, known today as “Cueva de Morales” still remains on the Coast of the Seals, and reminds us of his memory. As a matter of fact, this place has been a mute but inspiring witness to many conversations about monk seals and Saharan fauna among the researchers who follow in his footsteps on the coasts of the Sahara.

For the people who had the pleasure and privilege to know him, the fascinating stories of his scientific journeys by camel across the Sahara, transported us to better times and inspired us to continue working for the recovery of Saharan fauna, especially the monk seal.

– **Jorge Fernández Layna**, Fundación CBD-Habitat

Further reading

Morales Agacino E. 1950. Notes sur les Phoques-Moines (*Monachus monachus* Herm.) du Littoral Saharien Espagnol. Mammalia 14 (1-2): 1-6, 2 pls.

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International News

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Mystery at RAC/SPA

Time for pup-catching, says its anonymous expert(s)

Many readers will be forgiven for not realising the key role that the Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) plays in the conservation of the Mediterranean monk seal. While some cynics might argue that monk seals have certainly not realised it either, the Center has sponsored useful studies over the years, including field surveys in Libya [Monachus Science II, TMG 6 (1): June 2003] and Syria [Monachus Science III, TMG 6 (1): June 2003].

Tunis-based RAC/SPA – one of whose mandates is to coordinate the implementation of the UN Action Plan for the recovery of *Monachus monachus* – also formed a 5-member "Group of Experts" in 2002 to pinpoint priority actions for the species. These would then be used to advise and guide government officials attending the meeting of National Focal Points of the Barcelona Convention in Marseilles on 17-20 June 2003.

The Group, composed of experts from Greece, Italy, Morocco, Spain and Turkey, duly met in Lathakia, Syria, on 29-30 September 2002, and drew up their list of recommendations [RAC/SPA confronts Action Plan failures in Syria, TMG 5 (2): November 2002]. These focused primarily on establishing protected areas, ensuring adequate management of new and existing reserves, and further scientific research to identify critical seal habitat.

The resulting document [UNEP(DEC)MED WG.232/Inf.6.] was submitted to the Marseilles meeting as an annex "Information Document" to the RAC/SPA's own "Progress Report of the Activities of RAC/SPA". TMG, however, has been informed by 3 of the report's authors that they did not see, review or approve the final draft of the document before its release. Subsequent requests to obtain the document from RAC/SPA also elicited no response [see also Barcelona Convention slip-up has Turkish monk seals disappear from the conservation radar screen, this issue].

Possibly, it is here where the plot thickens, for RAC/SPA's own recommendations for action presented at Marseilles – written in admirably insistent prose, it has to be said – bear no resemblance whatsoever to those formulated by its own Group of Experts.

Lamenting government inaction and the dwindling fortunes of the species, the report declares:

> "The situation is too critical to put off action any longer. Action must be taken now. For a species in critical danger of extinction the risk of doing nothing may be even greater than risking starting management actions and may justify active intervention.
>
> The reasons driving to the monk seal extinction [sic] are very well known: the main one is killing, mostly deliberate but also accidental, almost exclusively by fishermen; it is followed by human degradation of breeding areas. Although actions at several levels are needed for the long term survival of this species, priority should be given now to direct measures to neutralize these two root problems, concentrating on them every effort and economic allocation on behalf of the species within the areas where it still subsists, and rescheduling other measures until a trend in this long lasting situation changes."

Providing details, the report goes on to pinpoint its recommendations for action, including:

- **A ban on setting nets around breeding caves** to a distance of 5 nautical miles. This measure, claims the report, should statistically reduce interactions between fishers and seals by one third.
- Possible implementation of mandatory, **nationwide insurance schemes for net damage**, thereby helping to mitigate one of the primary causes of direct killing by artesanal fishers. The report, however, suggests that no more than 5% of net damage can be attributable to seals (other causes include dolphins, eels, rocks, general wear and tear), a figure that is unlikely to impress fishermen.
- A feasibility project to allow **artesanal fishermen to profit from the conservation process by carrying paying tourists** on their fishing trips. Although few will argue with the central idea of encouraging local stakeholder involvement in SPAs, there is growing disquiet about efforts to encourage unregulated ecotourism in monk seal areas. The report stresses that licenses should only be issued "where healthy marine mammals presence is yearly proved". Under a subsequent point, it goes on to advocate that entry into caves by tourists be specifically banned and that, with the exception of fishing boats, navigation be prohibited 500m around caves.
- **Greater efforts to prosecute the killers of monk seals**, including the setting up of national ad hoc prosecution committees. So far, in the 15 years' of the Action Plan's existence, charges the RAC/SPA report, not a single prosecution has been brought against those responsible for these crimes [see Alleged monk seal killers acquitted: case heads to Supreme Court, this issue, and Monk seal deaths, TMG 6 (1): June 2003]. Where foul play is suspected, says the report, every monk seal death should be thoroughly investigated.
- **Capture and translocation.** Citing government inaction and the alleged failure of in situ conservation measures to justify its insistence that more invasive actions are now vital, the report advocates "the temporary transfer of both weaned pups and every captive raised one from areas where killings continue into fully safe semicaptivity locations." The report continues:

  "These locations should be enclosures of wild areas and not fully artificial installations, as always proposed before. The seals should be raised there, including life fish [sic] on their diet, to the verge of maturity (four years the females and seven years the males) with minimal visual close contact with humans. Locations should preferably be less than three, until first successful raisings being fully on course. They should be properly preserved areas within the historical distribution area of the species and separated from present wild stocks, to preclude them to be affected by any stochastic catastrophe hitting wild individuals (epidemic, red tide, oil spill, etc). Raised animals should be released in their exact places of origin to restock them or, should it be risky for them, in the closest full-safe one. One example of physically suitable location to raise the seals could be the Meleda lagoons, in the National Park of Mljet, Croatia, which possesses advantages as protection status, big size, and easiness to enclose seals inside it, fact already done in the middle ages to trap them. However, other feasible locations should be researched, the criteria being the most optimal possibilities for the species and the willingness of host countries to collaborate on its behalf."

Most objective observers would not argue about the indifference with which most national governments – despite their legal obligations and promises – have treated the monk seal. Nor would they reject the importance of scientific debate of controversial management actions that, experience has shown, could well end up killing monk seals [see Conservation Guidelines, 955KB].

Despite some promising and energetic conservation solutions (for example, the proposed ban on setting nets outside breeding caves) many question marks hang over RAC/SPA policy. Why has it disregarded the recommendations of its own Group of Experts, consigning their views to an annex that few officials will bother to read? And who, exactly, has formulated its action priority recommendations in a document that bears no name? Which scientists, if any, supported the view that we should now "rescue" pups from their mothers and transport them to UN safe havens in other regions and countries? And if such secure zones *can* be created, why not create them where the seals are still living?

Unfortunately, the report does not tell us – and nor does it explain why funds would be available for such costly schemes when fieldworkers are still struggling to find the price of a can of petrol to run their patrol boats in protected areas [Funding crisis strikes Turkish, Greek and international efforts, TMG 6 (1): June 2003]. Even more importantly, perhaps, it does not reveal why this scandalous state of affairs should be any different in the RAC/SPA safe havens.

It is known that at least one government Focal Point reacted with alarm when reading the RAC/SPA proposals in preparation for the Marseilles meeting. Though the precise causes remain uncertain at present, it appears that the meeting could not agree on the range of measures presented to them. As a result, the delegates appear to have deferred a decision in the UN bureaucracy's time-honoured fashion, voting instead to convene another "high-level meeting" in 2004 [see Barcelona Convention slip-up has Turkish monk seals disappear from the conservation radar screen, this issue, and Mediterranean states commit to implement "urgent actions", below].

Although TMG contacted RAC/SPA several times for further comment and information, the secretariat in Tunis did not respond.

Sadly, this follows a tediously familiar path, well trodden by advocates of monk seal captive breeding and translocation. Those who most favour such invasive conservation actions for the species have always been the ones most reluctant to encourage or to engage in open debate on these issues. Even so, it is a dark day indeed when a UN organization withholds public documents on the basis that releasing them, and making them available for scrutiny and debate, may damage pet policies that enjoy no consensus.

Further reading

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UNEP/MAP. 1987. Action plan for the management of the Mediterranean monk seal *(Monachus monachus).* United Nations Environment Programme, Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP). Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas, Tunis, Tunis & Athens. [18KB].

Mediterranean states commit to implement “urgent actions”

National delegations from the 22 Mediterranean Basin countries convened at Catania, Sicily between 11-14 November 2003 for the 13th Meeting of Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution.

Addressing the issues of Biological Diversity and Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (UNEP/MED IG.15/5, II.B. page 13), the Plenary adopted, amongst other measures, the following recommendations to the governments of the Contracting Parties for the 2004-2005 biennium concerning the protection of the Mediterranean monk seal:

- To invite all the concerned parties to hold a high-level stakeholder meeting to define appropriate ways of urgently implementing actions for the effective protection of the Mediterranean monk seal, on the basis of the reports of the expert group convened by RAC/SPA in 2002.
- To promote, when necessary, the creation of protected zones in those areas where Mediterranean monk seals are concentrated.

As the framework for protection of Mediterranean monk seal habitats in the EU Mediterranean countries has already been established through EU law and the Natura 2000 network, the above adopted recommendations, if implemented accordingly, may prove particularly important for the protection of the species in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean basin, such as Libya and Turkey, where it is estimated that significant populations of monk seals still exist. – Kostas Triantafillou

The numbers game (II)

Thousands of islands, inaccessible coastlines, and a species that shies away from human contact have all conspired to make population estimates for the Mediterranean monk seal *(Monachus monachus)* an extraordinarily inexact science. Partly because of their own tendency to err on the side of caution, historically, biologists have consistently underestimated the numbers of monk seals populating the Mediterranean. Conversely, errors can also creep into population estimates when biologists rely on old data. On more occasions than the authors would probably care to remember, this has resulted in monk seal colonies being placed in areas where they have been extinct for many years. The only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty is that the Mediterranean monk seal remains critically endangered, and that its range has shrunk dramatically over the last 50 years.

At the risk of continuing the tradition of pulling numbers out of a hat, we present this, our second updated population estimate, based on various sources (many of them published within TMG). It should be remembered that question marks hang over monk seal abundance in most of these regions and countries. As such, these figures should be treated with caution.

However, readers will notice at least one major change compared to our first Numbers Game [TMG 3 (1): May 2000]: according to researchers, the monk seal has finally become extinct in the Black Sea.

A failure to confirm any recent sightings in Croatia also appears to spell a final tragic end to the species that once frequented the Coast of a Thousand Islands.

Italy and Sardinia remain at “0” despite recent sightings, because researchers have yet to identify occupied habitat.

As a result of more intensive research, Turkey is expected to increase its population estimates for the species in the months ahead: for the time being, the estimate remains at 50.

Following the mass mortality that struck the world’s largest surviving monk seal colony in the western Sahara in 1997, 103 individuals were estimated to survive (mean estimate: 95% CI: 77 – 148, Forcada, Hammond & Aguilar 1999), down from 300. These estimates are generally considered more reliable than those obtained elsewhere since they relied upon clearly-defined photo-identification procedures, often impractical elsewhere. New estimates of 150 individuals are based on interpretations of evidence by researchers – counts of seals at low tide in breeding caves, increasing beach counts, decreasing mortalities – but have not been confirmed by capture-recapture methods (that compare data from different sample frames).

Mediterranean monk seal population estimates

area	regional subtotal	area total
Black Sea		**0 – 0**
Bulgaria	0	
Georgia	0	
Romania	0	
Russia	0	
Turkey	0	
Ukraine	0	
Eastern Mediterranean		**255 – 315**
Albania	0	
Croatia	0	
Cyprus	5	
Egypt	0	
Greece	200 – 250	
Israel	0	
Lebanon	0	
Libya	5 – 10	
Serbia and Monte Negro	0	
Slovenia	0	
Syria	0	
Turkey	50	
Western Mediterranean		**15 – 30**
Algeria	10 – 20	
France & Corsica	0	
Italy & Sardinia	0	
Malta	0	
Morocco	5 – 10	
Spain	0	
Tunisia	0	
Atlantic		**180**
Azores (Portugal)	0	
Canary Islands (Spain)	0	
Cape Verde Islands	0	
Gambia	4	
Madeira (Portugal)	24	
Mauritania	2	
Morocco	0	
Senegal	0	
western Sahara	150	
TOTAL		**450 – 525**

Acknowledgements: Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat, Madrid, Spain; Harun Güçlüsoy, SAD-AFAG, Foça, Turkey.

Additional Sources

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Forcada J., P.S. Hammond and A. Aguilar. 1999. Status of the Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus* in the western Sahara and the implications of a mass mortality event. Marine Ecology Progress Series 188: 249-261.

González L. M. 1999. Update on the situation of the Mediterranean monk seal (English translation). *In:* Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. Scientific Council of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. 9th Meeting, Cape Town, 4-6 November 1999: 1-16 + 6 maps.

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Kiraç C.O. 2001. Witnessing the monk seal's extinction in the Black Sea, TMG 4 (2): November 2001.

Kiraç C.O., Y. Savas, H. Güçlüsoy and N.O. Veryeri. 1998. Status and Distribution of Monk Seals *Monachus monachus* (Hermann 1779) along Turkish Coasts. World Marine Mammal Science Conference, Monaco, 19-24 January 1998, Workshop on the World's Endangered Monk Seals, SAD-AFAG Poster Presentation [51KB].

Seal rehab proceedings published online

Proceedings of the April 2002 ECS Workshop, *Seal Rehabilitation in theory and practice: protocols, techniques, cases* [see Rehab workshop convenes in Liege, TMG 5 (1): May 2002] have at last been published online:

> **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 issue on platform 12

At the risk of sounding like a UK station announcement, we would like to apologise for the late arrival of December's Monachus Guardian.

This year, the journal has been produced on an entirely voluntary basis, despite the fact that the publication continues to fulfil a conservation "Action Priority" first identified at the Rhodes Conference in 1978.

On the plus side, TMG retains its independence as a publication that defends the interests of monk seals, and reflects the diverse views of those who are engaged in the frontline conservation of the species and their threatened habitats.

Responding to a suggestion from several readers, we hope to publish more on the funding issue in our next edition – including 'who pays what and who does not'.

EndQuote

"It's a fire alarm," says Richard Ellis about his new book, The Empty Ocean, which joins a chorus of recent publications documenting the precipitous decline of world fisheries and the dire state of the marine environment. That alarm should make you think long and hard about your lunchtime tuna sandwich or the sashimi you order at your favorite Japanese restaurant…

In The Empty Ocean, Ellis recounts the historical eradication of entire marine species, including Caribbean monk seals, Labrador ducks, and Steller's sea cow, which was slaughtered to extinction in less than 30 years. "Only recently have biologists come to understand the intricacies of fish breeding, recruitment, and migration, and for many species the revelations have come too late," Ellis writes. Yet despite all we have learned about ecology and biology, he says, we continue to decimate ocean species: "We have entered an era in which the lesson of the sea cows has been ignored, usually in the name of short-term profits."…

So what do we do now? "I wish we could turn the clock back," says Ellis. Barring that, he says, we must take steps to protect and restore what's left. "Marine reserves that incorporate no-take zones, which means no fishing by anybody," are essential to stemming the decline of world fisheries," he writes. But, he adds, "even penicillin won't work if you don't take it." How, then, to ensure that marine ecosystems get the protection they need? "We have to keep this going," says Ellis of the current barrage of books, articles, reports, and editorials detailing the plight of the oceans. Otherwise, he says, "the only way these lessons will get driven home, is when fish is no longer on the menu."

– From Cod Is Dead. Richard Ellis's The Empty Ocean delves into the world of marine destruction, by Elizabeth Grossman, Grist Magazine, 24 July 2003.

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Hawaiian News

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Update on efforts to protect the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands: Essential habitat of *Na ʻÏlio holo ikauaua,* the Hawaiian monk seal *(Monachus schauinslandi)*

Cha Smith, KAHEA and Stephanie Fried, Ph.D, Environmental Defense

Mysterious Activity at Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources

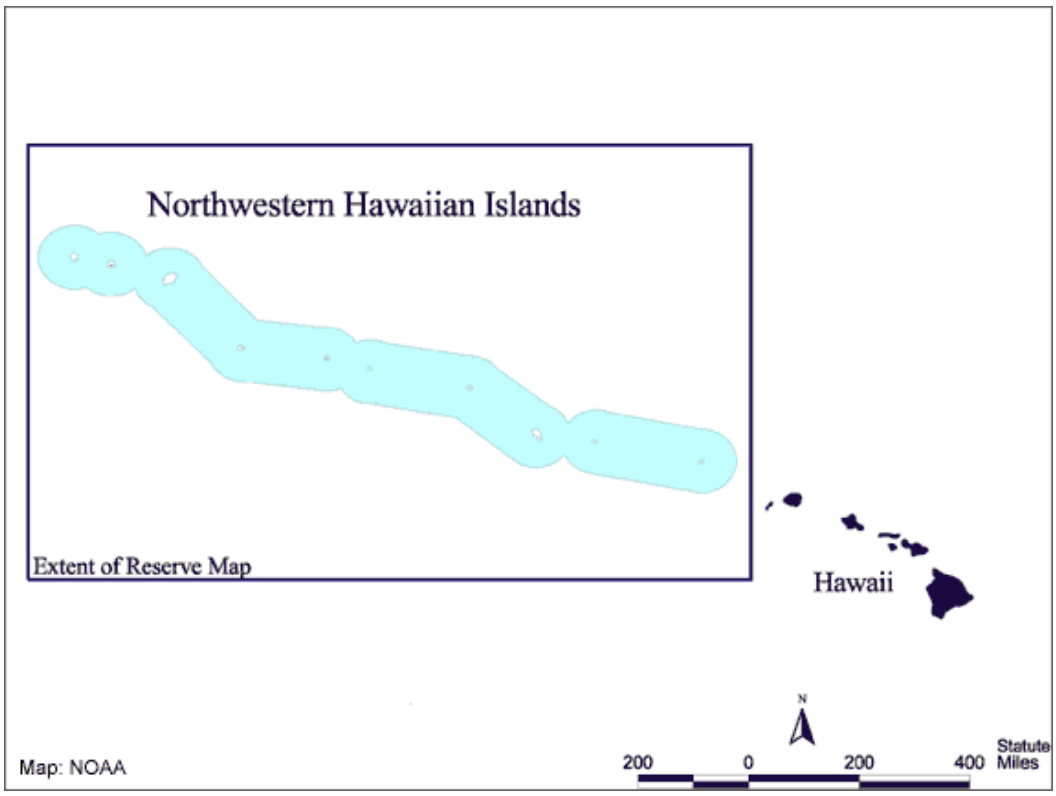
In March 2001, Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources proposed a "fishery management area" in NWHI state waters [see Northwestern Hawaiian Islands – Creating a Pu'uhonua for Future Generations, TMG 6 (1): June 2003]. The three-mile state boundaries are inside the protected federal waters of the NWHI Reserve. In overwhelming comment and testimony, the public soundly rejected the state's attempt to create fishing zones in the fragile lagoons and reefs within state waters. The state replaced its fishery plan with a proposed refuge for state waters that was based on public feedback. The draft protective refuge plan was welcomed by activists and approved for public comment by the State's Land Board, the Governor and the State Attorney General.

However, in November 2003, activists familiar with the proposed refuge plan discovered that the version released to the public for comment prior to scheduled public hearings, was **not** the version that had been formally approved. The version released to the public had been drastically altered, weakening protections and undermining DLNR's stated intent to establish a refuge in the state waters adjacent to the Reserve waters. The DLNR's Division of Aquatic Resources finally agreed to retract the mysteriously altered version, cancelled the November hearings and announced new hearings for February 2004.

An independent investigation of the manner by which the refuge plans were quietly and apparently illegally changed is currently underway.

NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve being considered for Sanctuary Program

The Sanctuary designation process is moving at full speed in what appears to be a race for the fastest designation process in the history of the Sanctuary program. (The average sanctuary designation process takes seven years.) KAHEA, Environmental Defense and other partners have remained deeply involved in the federally controlled process to determine if the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve should be incorporated as a national "sanctuary." Our central goal is to ensure that vital protections already in existing law (the NWHI Executive Orders and the National Wildlife Refuge system) are not weakened during this process.



NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (click here for more detailed map)

We are not assured by the nature of this process for the following reasons:

1. The NWHI Reserve Council was denied the right to develop regulations to implement protections outlined in the Executive Order and establish a framework for enforcement actions.
2. The Department of Commerce has refused to implement available surveillance technology that would protect the integrity of this remote and fragile ecosystem.
3. Key representatives on the Reserve Council were removed by the Department of Commerce in August and opportunities for public involvement in the Reserve process have been drastically reduced.
4. NOAA has still not released the Reserve Operations Plan submitted by the NWHI Reserve Council for review last June. NOAA had initially claimed that this comprehensive management document would become the foundation of the proposed NWHI Sanctuary management plan and would guide the development of suggested alternative management scenarios under the NEPA process.
5. NOAA initiated a series of consultations with Wespac, state fishery staff and NMFS scientists to determine the basis for Wespac's fishing regulations. The public was initially cut out of this secretive process, as meetings were by invitation only. However, when members of the public and advocacy organizations persisted and found out when and where the meetings were held, they were allowed to attend as observers.
6. In October, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council released a fatally flawed Draft EIS for bottomfish and seamount groundfish fishery, much of which occurs in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Environmental Defense, Sierra Club, and the Ocean Conservancy expressed concern that even though the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve was established three years ago, the National Marine Fisheries Service has not amended the Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (Bottomfish FMP) to comply with the NWHI Executive Orders. In addition, Wespac's bottomfish DEIS presents a "no action" alternative that assumes that the NWHI Executive Orders do not exist.

Next Steps:

- The Draft Reserve Operations Plan may be released for public comment in early 2004. DLNR has stated that it will schedule public hearings and comment on the Refuge in February 2004.
- Public comment is crucial to **defend the existing protections in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands**. Every voice will help protect this world treasure as a true Pu'uhonua (Place of Refuge and Regeneration).

To stay informed of upcoming public comment opportunities, sign up with the Action Alert Network at www.kahea.org or www.environmentaldefense.org/hawaii.

You will receive notification of upcoming hearings with important background information and have the opportunity to fax your comments directly to decision-makers.

For more information, please feel free to contact:

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Further information

Fried, S. 2003. Comments of Environmental Defense concerning the draft EIS for bottomfish and seamount groundfish fisheries in the Western Pacific Region, December 1, 2003: 1-5. [84KB].

Smith, C. 2003. Northwestern Hawaiian Islands – Creating a Pu'uhonua for Future Generations, TMG 6 (1): June 2003.

Hawaiian Press Watch

For better or worse, monk seals have appeared in the Hawaiian press and media on numerous occasions over the last few months – often reflecting ambivalent human attitudes towards a species that is beginning to recolonize the main Hawaiian Islands and is often not too shy about it, either. Human-seal interactions, sometimes just too rough-and-tumble for bathers, prompted the US Department of Land and Natural Resources to issue a news release on 30 October 2003 [Do Not Feed or Interact with Hawaiian Monk Seals, 124KB], "reminding boaters, fishermen, swimmers and others, that it is against state and federal laws to feed or harass endangered Hawaiian monk seals. It is harmful to the animals and dangerous to people."

For one young monk seal offender, however, it was a case 3 strikes and you're out: designated seal RM-32 was banished to the former US nuclear test site of Johnston Atoll for frolicking rather too roughly – and in some cases, amorously – with bathers.

Seal moved to Johnston Atoll Dec 03, 2003

A Hawaiian monk seal that developed a fondness for interacting with humans has been relocated to remote Johnston Atoll, the Coast Guard said Tuesday (West Hawaii Today, HI).

Frisky seal sent to Johnston Atoll Dec 03, 2003

A mischievous Hawaiian monk seal was banished to Johnston Atoll yesterday, after weeks of groping beachgoers on Maui and the Big Island. The endangered 300-pound male monk seal known as RM-34 was flown 800 miles away to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands aboard a Coast Guard C-130 Hercules from Air Station Barbers Point (Honolulu Advertiser, HI).

Persistent monk seal relocated to Johnston Atoll Dec 03, 2003

A Hawaiian monk seal was airlifted by the Coast Guard on Monday afternoon to Johnston Atoll, where it is hoped he will frolic with other seals rather than humans (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Seal moving to Johnston Atoll **Nov 24, 2003**

A Big Island–born Hawaiian monk seal has learned the truth of the saying “You snooze. You lose.” (West Hawaii Today, HI).

Maui’s mischievous seal captured again **Nov 22, 2003**

A playful but dangerous Hawaiian monk seal that eluded capture on Maui’s south coast this week finally ran out of luck yesterday. The seal known as RM-34 rests in a cage on Maui after a shot of Valium (Honolulu Advertiser, HI).

RM-34 on his way into exile.

Too big to play nice **Nov 22, 2003**

A playful Hawaiian monk seal that evaded capture for three days while he frolicked with swimmers was caught yesterday morning at La Perouse Bay on Maui and is headed for Johnston Atoll. (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Frisky seal is taking in Maui, swimmers **Nov 21, 2003**

A Hawaiian monk seal born on a remote Ka’u beach in 2001 is about to undergo his third relocation in a month after repeated interactions with humans. Wildlife officials say the behavior by the seal known as RM34 – playing with swimmers who are occasionally nipped and groped – is unhealthy for the animal and potentially dangerous for swimmers (Hawaii Tribune-Herald, HI).

Rogue monk seal still on loose off Maui coast **Nov 21, 2003**

The mammals might look cute but they can bite, experts caution. A 300-pound Hawaiian monk seal that has been relocated twice in the past month because it nipped and groped swimmers eluded capture by wildlife officials yesterday on Maui (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Monk seal of disapproval returns to Maui beaches **Nov 21, 2003**

He’s back – and he’s up to his old tricks. A frisky monk seal that was twice moved from a popular swimming area on the Big Island because of his naughty – and potentially dangerous – behavior has found his way back to civilization, this time on Maui (Honolulu Advertiser, HI).

Fishery needs more protective status **Nov 19, 2003**

These data required NMFS to classify the fishery as Category I and to begin preparing take reduction plans for the false killer whale and other imperiled marine mammal species in Hawaiian waters. In refusing to designate the Hawai‘i longline fishery as a Catagory I fishery, NMFS has failed to fulfill its kuleana (responsibility) and ignored its mission, resulting in additional needless deaths of false killer whales in Hawaiian waters,” said William Aila of Hui Malama i Kohola (Earth Justice, CA).

“Nipping and groping” swimmers **Nov 10, 2003**

Hawaii researchers see the monk seal in Kahoolawe waters. An endangered Hawaiian monk seal that was twice removed from Kealakekua Bay last month because he was “nipping and groping” swimmers may be settling in with his own kind off Kahoolawe (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Research dive yields secrets of the deep **Nov 07, 2003**

The University of Hawaii ship Ka‘imikai-o-Kanaloa returned from a Northwest Hawaiian Islands expedition on Wednesday… A UH vessel with subs finds new coral species and spots a monk seal in the deep ocean (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Public warned away from 2 seals **Oct 31, 2003**

Wildlife officials are warning people to avoid feeding or touching Hawaiian monk seals, after two of the endangered animals were getting too cozy with humans on Kauai and the Big Island. People have recently been feeding an adult male known as K07, or “Lucky,” in Kauai’s Nawiliwili Harbor. The animal swims up to docks and begs for fish, said

Shawn Farry, a biologist who has researched monk seals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Endangered Hawaiian monk seals interacting with swimmers at Poipu Beach, Kauai, April 2003.

Do Not Feed or Interact with Hawaiian Monk Seals
Oct 30, 2003 [124KB]

State, Federal Agencies Remind Public: Do Not Feed or Interact with Hawaiian Monk Seals. The Department of Land and Natural Resources and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries, U. S. Department of Commerce) are reminding boaters, fishermen, swimmers and others, that it is against state and federal laws to feed or harass endangered Hawaiian monk seals. It is harmful to the animals and dangerous to people (Department of Land and Natural Resources).

Seal swims back to Big Island bay **Oct 27, 2003**

The frisky monk seal of Kealakekua Bay on the Big Island was back at his old stomping grounds this weekend after he swam back from the waters off the southern tip of the island last week. The 2 1/2-year-old Hawaiian monk seal called RM34 was sent to his birthplace off South Point after his antics which included nipping and groping became a danger to himself and swimmers (Honolulu Advertiser, HI).

Friendly seal moved to isolated waters **Oct 23, 2003**

A frisky Hawaiian monk seal was moved from Kealakekua Bay on the Big Island after its playful antics became a danger to swimmers, federal marine fisheries officials said yesterday. Close interaction with people, as displayed in this photo taken Sunday, led to the transfer of a 2 1/2-year-old Hawaiian monk seal from Kealakekua Bay to waters closer to its birthplace (Honolulu Advertiser, HI).

Returned to his birth area **Oct 23, 2003**

A two-year-old Hawaiian monk seal has been returned to his birth area after he was reported to have come into contact with some swimmers in Kealakekua Bay, wildlife officials said Wednesday. The seal was captured and returned to his birth area in a remote location at the southern end of the Big Island to prevent further interaction with swimmers and possible harm, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service said (West Hawaii Today, HI).

University of Hawaii gets $8.6 million for science research **22 Oct 2003**

Projects include protected species investigations such as the Hawaiian monk seal program, coastal research on the Northwest Hawaiian islands marine debris program and coral reef mapping and climate research. "The support provided by NOAA has enabled our students and researchers to participate in research investigations and activities that have implications not only for Hawaii's marine and atmospheric environments but for the nation and the entire world as well," said Tom Schroeder, director of the Joint Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (Pacific Business News, HI).

Hawaiian seal project discussions start today **20 Oct 2003**

A series of meetings about a proposed National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration study of endangered Hawaiian monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands begins today on Molokai. Robert Braun, a marine mammal specialist, will lead the project to find out more about the monk seal's health, foraging ecology and habitat use (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI).

Isle ocean research to benefit from feds **19 Oct 2003**

Hawaii will receive about $13.7 million in federal funds for research and management of the islands' fisheries and ocean resources, U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye's office announced. About $8.7 million is earmarked for initiatives including further study of the endangered monk seal, coral reef health research and management, and physical oceanography and climate change, Inouye said in a news release.

Gear of fishers past is hauled up **1 Oct 2003**

That gill net, like another found nearby two weeks later with three dead harbor seals inside, is just the visible tip of an undersea tangle. These ghost nets, mostly gigantic trawl nets arriving from thousands of miles away, are the most serious threat to the survival of the Hawaiian monk seal, America's most endangered marine mammal (Christian Science Monitor).

Other Hawaiian highlights

Cover Story: Plundering the Pacific: the cats who run the fishhouse – by Paul Koberstein…

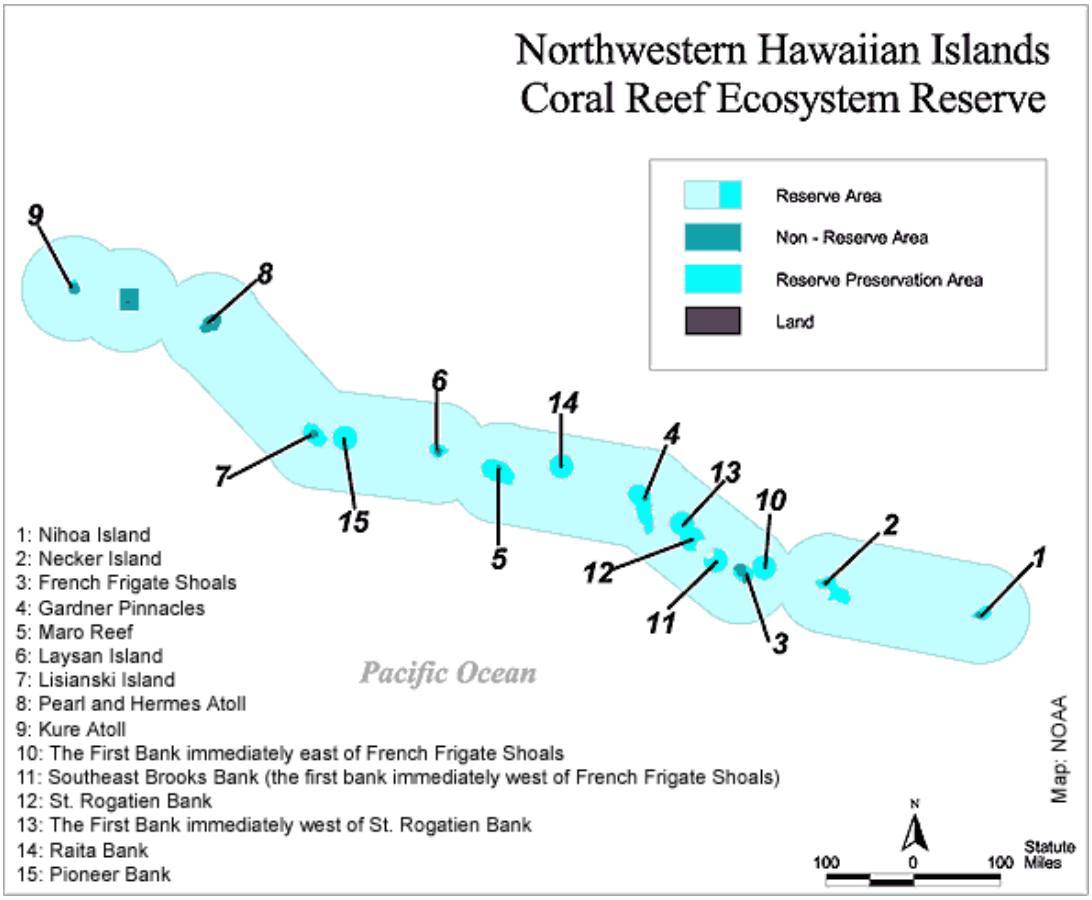
EndQuote

Seal fallout

"The Defense Department's decision to economize in the control of radioactive rubble left over from nuclear testing on Johnston Atoll is causing legitimate concerns about the long-term environmental risk…

The Air Force conducted a dozen nuclear-test launchings in the 1950s and 1960s at the four-island atoll, less than 800 miles southwest of Honolulu. Two of the missiles exploded over the runway on Johnson Island, the largest of the islands. The government has spent four decades gathering the 60,000 cubic yards of radioactive contaminants that the aborted tests sprayed over Johnston Island. Manmade plutonium, one of the most hazardous elements in the rubble, is estimated to pose a danger for 6,000 to 24,000 years."

Source: Protection needed from Johnston rubble, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI, 28 January 2003.


Northwestern Hawaiian Islands
Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve
Reserve Area
Non - Reserve Area
Reserve Preservation Area
Land
9
8
6
14
4
13
10
2
1
7
15
5
12
11
3
Pacific Ocean
1: Nihoa Island
2: Necker Island
3: French Frigate Shoals
4: Gardner Pinnacles
5: Maro Reef
6: Laysan Island
7: Lisianski Island
8: Pearl and Hermes Atoll
9: Kure Atoll
10: The First Bank immediately east of French Frigate Shoals
11: Southeast Brooks Bank (the first bank immediately west of French Frigate Shoals)
12: St. Rogatien Bank
13: The First Bank immediately west of St. Rogatien Bank
14: Raita Bank
15: Pioneer Bank
Map: NOAA
N
100
0
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The Monachus Guardian
monachus / schauinslandi / tropicalis

Mediterranean News

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Greece

Mothers and pups in focus on Piperi

A pilot project to install and test a video surveillance system in a monk seal shelter on Piperi is already delivering its first images of a mother and newborn pup.

Piperi forms the core zone of the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS), believed to harbour the largest monk seal population in Mediterranean.

Over the years, scientific monitoring of the species and its habitat by MOm researchers has yielded a considerable amount of biological data on the NMPANS population, as well as more general information on the ecology and behavior of the species. The pilot video monitoring system is expected to contribute substantially to such scientific knowledge, providing a non-invasive method of observation that can yield insights into little-known aspects of monk seal behaviour, including reproduction and mother-pup relations.

In identifying the most suitable shelter to install the system, the research team took 12 years of data on birth cave preferences into account, and also additional information on cave morphology. Piperi is an isolated island with steep, friable cliffs, making the system all the more difficult to install and to protect from the elements. Once all the necessary data had been analysed, however, the final choice of installation site offered several important advantages: during daytime, the cave has adequate natural lighting, making use of the infrared illuminators unnecessary; outside the cave, natural features in the cliff face offered some protection from the worst of the weather for the installation of photovoltaic solar panels, batteries and hard-drive data recorder.

The assembly and installation of the system was completed in early July and quickly commenced its trial operation.

Funds permitting, MOm hopes to deploy a far more advanced, remote-controlled video monitoring system on Piperi next year, designed not only with scientific research in mind but also core zone surveillance and education and public awareness. – Panos Dendrinos, MOm.

Mother, pup and a third seal (in upper image), captured by video camera in Piperi.

An earlier image captured by the system (at a higher sampling rate) of two seals leaving the Piperi cave.

Pup tally

MOm's research team has so far recorded 16 monk seal births during the current 2003-2004 reproduction season in the organisation's three main study areas.

Four newborn seals have been recorded in the core zone of the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades, 8 in the Kimolos-Polyaigos area and 4 in the area of N. Karpathos-Saria.

Because of stormy weather conditions prevailing during winter, pups may sometimes be swept away or become separated from their mothers. Any member of the public observing a seal in distress should not approach the animal but contact MOm immediately on 210 5222 888. The Rescue Team is on a 24-hour alert in order to provide first aid services to any helpless seal. – Panos Dendrinos, Jeny Androukaki, & Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

Management authority convenes on Alonissos

After a long, 11-year wait, the management authority of the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades finally convened its inaugural meeting on 1 August 2003 at the island's Biological Research Station at Gerakas. Chaired by its government-appointed President, Professor Nikolaos Delezios of the School of Agricultural Sciences in Volos, the meeting marked the first time that local stakeholders, conservation interests and government officials had gathered to map out the future operation of the Park, and to grapple with serious management issues such as guarding, zonation, fisheries and alternative economic opportunities. If past experience is anything to go by, one of the most serious issues the authority and its President will have to wrestle with will be economic – securing a realistic budget for its own operation.

President of the NMPANS, Prof. Nikolaos Delezios (head of table) convenes a historic first meeting of the management authority.

Monk seal conservation interests are represented on the management authority by MOm, which for many years has played a pivotal role in the operation of the Park, including guarding activities, scientific monitoring of the seal population, rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned seals, and the operation of visitor centres. – Panos Dendrinos, MOm.

Further information

The islands at the end of the line, TMG 4 (2): November 2001.

All at sea – adrift in the Northern Sporades Marine Park, TMG 4 (2): November 2001.

Renovated visitor centre on Alonissos

The beginning of the summer period found the MOm Information Centre in Patitiri, Alonnisos freshly renovated and ready to welcome visitors.

The main reception area was rearranged, the walls painted and the lighting of the whole Centre redesigned. Also, the skeleton of a Mediterranean monk seal was reassembled and placed in a 3-D presentation, as well as the skull of a *Ziphius cavirostris* found in the area in the past. The main overhaul, however, had to do with the texts and the photographs of the information displays, which were enriched, and the setting-up of the interactive game "Illustrious Mastermind", covering one wall of the Centre. This game poses questions on the Marine Park, the Mediterranean monk seal and the marine ecosystem as a whole, challenging the player to find the correct answer. In this way, both young and older friends of the monk seal have fun learning in an innovative way. – Eleni Tounta, MOm.

Recording human activities in conservation areas

As part of its EU-funded LIFE-Nature programme – *The Mediterranean monk seal: Conservation Action in two Greek Natura 2000 Sites* – MOm has been monitoring and recording human activities in the Kimolos-Polyaigos and N. Karpathos-Saria areas, both of which are important breeding habitats of the species. The aim of the project is to develop a sound monitoring system that can provide reliable data to marine park management bodies on which to

base their decisions on such vital matters as guarding and zonation.

MOm has subsequently created an electronic database to record boat traffic and human activities within the areas concerned. In both Kimolos-Polyaigos and N. Karpathos-Saria, activities were recorded from the project's new surveillance vessels, launched in November last year [see Surveillance systems launched, TMG 6 (1): 2003].

According to data collected in Kimolos-Polyaigos, the surveillance vessel "Kimolos" sailed 127 times, logging 319 hours at sea. During these missions, more than 1,500 boats were recorded in the area, providing evidence of relatively high intensity boat traffic engaged in various activities. Of the total recorded, 43% were pleasure boats, 27% large-scale commercial fishing boats, 22% small-scale subsistence fishing boats, 3% merchant ships, 3% ferry boats and finally less than 1% tourist boats.

In the Karpathos-Saria area, the surveillance vessel "Saria" sailed 99 times, logging 370 hours at sea, during which it recorded 419 boats. The distribution of total boat traffic in this area was considerably different, comprising 11% pleasure boats, 77% large-scale commercial fishing boats, 12% tourist boats and, finally, 1% merchant boats. – Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

Antonis Sardis, responsible for surveillance on the "Kimolos".

Management authority for Karpathos

On World Environment Day, 5th June 2003, the Minister for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works announced the formation of the Management Body for Karpathos-Saria, along with 25 other similar authorities to administer some of the most important nature conservation sites in Greece. This represents a major landmark for the future protection of Karpathos-Saria, an important breeding site for the Mediterranean monk seal.

The single objective of the new Management Body – legally, a private, non-profit organisation – is the administration and management of the entire spectrum of protected entities in the Karpathos-Saria area. The ten-member Managing Committee of the Management Body, as defined by the Ministerial Decision, is constituted by representatives of the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Development and Merchant Marine, the South Aegean Periphery, the Dodecanese Prefectural Government, the Olympos Municipality, stakeholders representing the productive sectors of the local economy, a local non-governmental organization and a specialist scientist from Aegean University. Michalis Chaniotis, a teacher, was appointed Chairman.

According to law 2742/99, the duties of the Management Body are as follows:

- Implementation of the necessary works, studies and actions for the conservation of the natural environment, the physical planning and the rational development of the protected area.
- Provision of expert advice to competent administrative bodies on the harmonization of human activities within prevailing local conditions.
- Provision of consultative services to Local Government regarding the area's development prospects.
- Informing public opinion on the importance of the protected area and implemented actions.
- Development of environmental education and training actions.
- Identifying and managing the necessary management resources for the area.

The creation of the Management Body marks the beginning of an integrated and participatory management approach towards conservation of the area's natural environment.

Although MOm was not selected to participate in the Managing Committee, it will nevertheless seek close cooperation with its members, so that the Committee may benefit from its experience and expertise in marine conservation. – Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm.

Opening ceremony in Karpathos

MOm's new Information Centre in Karpathos opened its doors on Sunday 29th June with an official ceremony attended by civic leaders and the Chairman of the Karpathos-Saria Management Body, Michalis Chaniotis. The

traditional blessing was followed by a welcoming address by MOm and local dignitaries, who once again expressed their commitment to support the conservation actions in the area. Both the Information Centres of Karpathos and Kimolos operated throughout the summer months, welcoming over 3,000 visitors. – Fotini Sfakianaki, MOm.

Children of Diafani at MOm's new Information Centre in Karpathos.

EC supports civic dialogue between Turkey and Greece

MOm participated in a workshop that was held on 14-15 November in Istanbul, entitled *The Future of Greek-Turkish Civic Dialogue*. This forms part of a broader initiative known as the *Civil Society Development Program*, funded by the European Commission.

Within the context of Turkish-Greek Civic Dialogue, the EC Representation to Turkey and the NGO Support Team organized a series of workshops in order to bring together civic initiatives, local authorities, academics and representatives of the media of both countries.

The NGO Support Team's objectives are to:

- Stimulate citizens' initiatives in all parts of Turkey and enhance the professional and management capacity of Turkish NGOs
- Strengthen the capacity of Turkish NGOs for dialogue and networking, as well as stimulating partnership projects both domestically and with counterparts in Greece and other parts of the EU
- Have the CSDP office also work as a consultancy centre for NGOs
- Organize workshops and a knowledge database in order to improve Turkish-Greek civic dialogue.

MOm has previously engaged in a government-supported partnership initiative with its monk seal conservation counterpart in Turkey, SAD-AFAG, which consisted of exchange study visits in Alonissos and Foça respectively [see Meeting of minds, TMG 5(1): May 2002]. – Vrassidas Zavras, MOm.

Mediterranean News continues with Italy, Madeira, Mauritania & Western Sahara, and Turkey…

The Monachus Guardian
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Mediterranean News

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Italy

Exploring the old haunts of the monk seal around Sicily's Egadi Islands

– By Luigi Guarrera, Gruppo Foca Monaca (GFM)

Marettimo (Egadi islands, NW of Sicily). "Here the sea has a very special fascination," Pietrino Eduardo Duran writes in an old publication, *A Pearl at the Bottom of the Sea*, published in 1928 – "but nobody visits Marettimo… It is a pity this beautiful island be not near Naples…" (Capri at that time was very à la page, notes the author).

Marettimo.
Photo: Ugo Mellone / www.wildphoto.it

The island of Marettimo is still so beautiful. Like being in another dimension. Reach of colours, perfumes, pine forests, only one village, no houses scattered about, an enchanting, so transparent sea, and many marine caves… The ideal habitat for monk seals, which lived here until the end of the 70s, but were so heavily persecuted by the local fishermen and tragically exterminated, as in many other parts of the Mediterranean.

Here in Marettimo some GFM members set ashore last October, after the nowadays crowded summer season, thanks to the courtesy and kind hospitality of Franco De Salvo, a journalist very active on the island, who invited us to check today's situation, after some rumours of recent seal sightings. Unfortunately the week devoted to our visit was, where weather conditions were concerned, the worst for many months, with rain and thunderstorms, so we were unable to start a planned survey of at least some of the caves as potential refuges for pilgrim seals… But we discovered something quite precious: the interesting reality of the local people, including the majority of the fishermen, now feeling sorry that their seals can no longer be found around the island anymore.

We were coddled by the former mayor, Vito Vaccaro, State Forestry Guard, the founder of an active local association which, among other aims, wants to protect the island environment… And some nice, if naïve, inhabitants wanted to know if it was possible for us "to import" some monk seal specimens and put them back in the island waters… while the new mayor wanted our reaction to his idea of placing a statue of the marine mammal in the old port as a commemoration of its presence in the past, with the hope of a "return" in the future…

Our group of experts had the chance to visit only four caves out of many opening along the Marettimo western coast, a lot of them under strong tourism pressure during the summer season, but peaceful during the rest of the year. Two were quite interesting from a… seal point of view, one being historically quoted as the most frequented by the *Monachus*… Which brings us, with some dramatic force, to a historical report by Pietrino Duran, which encapsulates some of the incredible nonsense that typified the human relationship with monk seals living around the island (this account, published in a small magazine, we discovered preserved in archives of the Vito Vaccaro's active local cultural association):

> "1st July 1901: for many days fishermen have been pointing out the presence of a large seal [*Phoca vitulina*, sic!] inside the picturesque cave of the Camel, near the old castle of Punta Troia. One evening, at nightfall, I decided to capture the huge pinniped. We prepared a small boat, piloted by the fisherman Pietro Spataro and by the young Nicolò Maiorana, and we weighed anchor in the company of two dear friends… We armed from head to foot, also providing ourselves with a good

quantity of ball cartridges and taking with us, for any eventuality, also a lamp… and then we went to visit… the beloved guest.

As soon as we entered the cave, and not too far from its entrance, we heard the animal's tremendous snoring, like the noise of an electric saw… The mammal was deeply sleeping!

We arranged the lamp so that its light was projected in front, so as to afford the best aim… Avoiding any noise or rustle that could awake the mammal, we entered and closed in with our guns levelled.

As we got nearer, and the seal appeared clearly, sleeping on the shore, I ordered my two friends to instantaneously open fire. Three simultaneous shots fired, and the poor animal was struck down because my sixteen-gauge ball had penetrated its heart, whilst the others' twelve-gauge had penetrated its back.

We flung ourselves upon the seal with the intention to catch it and put it inside the boat, but its weight was excessive, the boat very small, and already overburdened with our own load… so it was necessary to tow the pinniped to the village tied up with a strong rope… We photographed the animal, and we weighed it: 350 kg! We then skinned it: underneath, a thick layer of fat, for more than 100 kg of oil… We threw the carcass into the sea… The skin, opportunely tanned, decorates today my dearest friend Totò Leone's sitting-room… And still today, in the clean waters of the 'Camel' cave, seals find their shelter and we hope, on the first favourable occasion, to repeat this exciting hunt…"

The 'Camel' cave is there, with its beautiful shores inside, but today – during summer season at least -– it is visited only by fishermen's boats carrying noisy tourists… And the shadows of their old inhabitants, with all their memories, silently slide away during the darkest winter nights…

Reference

Duran, Pietrino. 1928. Le Grotte – Giro dell'isola in barca. Una perla in fondo al mare: 22.

Identifying monk seal habitat in Puglia

Following the monk seal sighting reported by a speargun fisherman in April 2003 along the coast of the Salento peninsula in Apulia [see Another seal sighting in Puglia, TMG 6 (1): June 2003], the location was inspected by GFM so as to verify the presence of suitable monk seal cave habitat.

The coast near Santa Maria di Leuca.
Photo: Ugo Mellone / www.wildphoto.it

The survey was also carried out to test the feasibility of deploying an infrared sensor capable of detecting a mammalian body. Unfortunately, the "cave" found at the location of the sighting was not considered of interest for the species. An infrared sensor was therefore placed further south of the sighting location, in a cave in which monk seals were sighted until the middle of the 1970s. It is hoped that future surveys may be conducted to identify suitable monk seal caves between Otranto and Santa Maria di Leuca. – Ugo Mellone, Emanuele Coppola, Luigi Guarrera, Gruppo Foca Monaca.

Madeira

New birth on Madeira

So far this breeding season, a single monk seal pup has been recorded on the Desertas Islands, reports Rosa Pires of the Parque Natural da Madeira. The first observations saw the pup using an open beach in the company of several other adults – behaviour that may suggest that the population is losing its fear of persecution as a result of stringent protection measures in force in the area [see Saving seals at Madeira… a passionate affair, this issue, and Beach life, Desertas-style, TMG 5 (1): May 2002]. “Although we have only one birth so far,” writes Rosa, “it was amazing to see three different females taking care of the same pup.”

On the main island of Madeira, meanwhile, sightings of seals continue and PNM researchers believe that at least one seal is regularly using its coasts to haul out and rest. After a spate of recent interactions between Madeirans and seals – some beachgoers unfortunately risking injury because of inappropriate behaviour – PNM continues its educational outreach through talks and the media [see Sightings collected, advice dispensed on Madeira, TMG 6 (1): June 2003].

Further information

Parque Natural da Madeira. 2003. Help us to help the monk seal. English brochure and sighting register: 1-2. [1.3MB]

Mauritania & Western Sahara

Shipwreck at Cap Blanc

On 4 August 2003, an anchor problem resulted in the Moroccan bulk carrier *Malika Tánger* drifting until it finally ran aground at the beach of the Satellite Reserve of Cap Blanc, a protected area administratively connected to the National Park of Banc D’Arguin (PNBA).

A 118 meters long, the *Malika Tánger* is a bulk carrier of significant size that was empty at the time of the accident, its own fuel load posing the only danger of hydrocarbon pollution in the protected area.

The presence of the stranded ship is also provoking environmental disturbance of a different kind, as efforts are made to re-float her. The presence and activity of workmen and machinery in the area is inevitably upsetting the tranquility of this important refuge for marine birds and the few seals that still haul out here.

The bulk carrier *Malika Tánger* high and dry in the Satellite Reserve.

So far, the ship’s owner, in coordination with the PNBA, has been making great efforts to re-float her, but so far, without success.

The original aim of establishing this Satellite Reserve was the protection of the monk seals that hauled out on its beaches. Seals were abundant in this location in the past, although since the mass mortality that struck the Cabo Blanco colony in 1997, only two animals have continued to use the area. Despite this small number, the Reserve remains a key location for progressive re-colonization in the near future.

This accident reflects the fragile vulnerability of both the Satellite Reserve and the nearby monk seal colony to the intense maritime traffic that occurs around the Cap Blanc peninsula.

Moreover, maritime traffic involving transport of hydrocarbons will increase in the area in the near future when Mauritania begins the exploitation of its recently discovered marine oilfields. Bearing in mind the recent *Prestige* disaster in Spain, preventive measures would seem vital for this west African coast, not only one of the most productive fishing grounds in the area, but also home to the world’s largest surviving colony of Mediterranean monk seals and the rich biological diversity found at the vast National Park of Banc D’Arguin.

Measures that should be considered with urgency include banning single-hull oil tankers from near shore navigation, the classification of this coast as a sensitive marine area, and the development of emergency response plans – including providing countries with the means to implement those plans. – Miguel Angel Cedenilla & Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat.

Significant decrease in infractions in the Coast of Seals Reserve

Since the start of regular marine surveillance in the "Coast of Seals" Reserve in December 2002 [see Improving surveillance of the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony, TMG 6 (1): 2003], setting of fishing nets in the area of the breeding caves has decreased significantly, and even disappeared during summer.

The region's lobster fishery is exploited throughout the year, although a marked peak in its activity is seen between May and September – the season of highest abundance of green lobster, when many pirogues from other harbours come to the Cabo Blanco peninsula Atlantic Coast to fish. As to be expected, during this time, infractions increase in the "Coast of Seals" Reserve, usually due to the arriving fishermen's lack of awareness about its existence.

A surveillance patrol in the "Coast of the Seals" Reserve.

Reacting to these pressures, marine surveillance becomes intensive during this period, and focuses on informing fishermen of the protection measures in force, and preventing them from setting nets in the reserve. During May and June, infractions peaked due to the constant arrival of many new fishing vessels, but the regular presence of the guards in the area resulted in infractions virtually disappearing at the end of June, with the incidence of set nets also approaching zero during the following months of August, September, October and November. – Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa & Miguel Angel Cedenilla, CBD-Habitat.

Social development: a helping hand to the local fishing community

Within the framework of the social development work that forms part of the CBD-Habitat monk seal project in Mauritania [see Conservation actions on the Cabo Blanco peninsula – a new approach, TMG 5 (2): November 2002], this year, several actions were implemented with funds from the Spanish Ministry of Environment, the Spanish International Cooperation Agency, Fundación Biodiversidad and Euronatur.

1. The captains of fishing pirogues have been trained in repair and maintenance of outboard engines. Training in the field of safety at sea has proved very useful for the fishing community in Mauritania – which experiences an unbelievably high number of fatal accidents every year – and has contributed positively to the excellent relations between conservationists and fishermen.

A course in outboard engine maintenance and repair.

Artesanal fishers attending a course in sustainable fishing.

2. In training courses in sustainable fishing methods, 150 fishermen from nearby fishing harbours learnt about fishing attitudes and practices, and actions to undertake in order to avoid the overexploitation of fishing

grounds that they are already suffering from. CBD-Habitat technicians were pleasantly surprised by the positive attitude that fishermen showed towards these courses, and the excellent atmosphere in which they were conducted.

3. Since summer, CBD-Habitat technicians have been performing regular monitoring of the catches fishermen are landing at harbour. The monitoring focuses on the green lobster (*Panulirus regius*), which is the main catch of the fishery deploying around the breeding caves of the reserve area. Green lobsters were very abundant in the region in earlier times but today, after decades of intense fishing, they are severely overexploited, resulting in a decrease in their average size and in their abundance. The aim of the monitoring is to obtain basic biological information and then to provide fishermen with a conduct code that will help them avoid overexploitation and fishing practices harmful to the lobster fishery, to the marine environment and therefore to the nearby monk seal colony. – Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa & Miguel Angel Cedenilla, CBD-Habitat.

Pupping season 2003

Twenty-four births have so far been recorded during the current pupping season at the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony.

In contrast to previous years, where the maximum number of pups was produced in October, this year September ranked as the month with the highest number of births, even doubling those produced in October.

The pup mortality rate for this period (from June to date) has been 0.33, and no major changes are expected until the end of the breeding season in May 2004. This is an unusually low and welcome rate of mortality for pups, produced as a direct consequence of the displacement in birth months. Storms and high swells are common in winter months, usually beginning with a high frequency in October and coinciding with a time when most pups in the breeding caves are just a few days old. During the three previous years, the pup mortality rate has been 0.60, 0.48 and 0.44 respectively. This year, when the storm season began, most of the pups were old enough to have a better chance of survival in the caves.

Although the breeding season is not yet over and the information is still being processed, a very possible explanation for this displacement of the peak of parturitions could be the high pup mortality rate of the last breeding season (0.60). When a mother loses her pup and the lactation period is interrupted, the length of the period between births decreases. Because of the high number of mothers who lost their pups last year, these females might have given birth earlier, thereby producing the peak of births in September rather than October.

Despite annual variations like these, pup mortality remains high in the overall situation of the Cabo Blanco colony. – Miguel Angel Cedenilla & Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat.

Mediterranean News continues with Turkey…

The Monachus Guardian
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Mediterranean News

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Turkey

Barcelona Convention slipup has Turkish monk seals disappear from the conservation radar screen

The 13th meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention was held in Catania, Sicily on 11-14 November 2003 [see Mystery at RAC/SPA and Mediterranean states commit to implement "urgent actions", International News, this issue]. Along with the ministerial delegations of contracting Mediterranean states and national/international NGOs, SAD-AFAG also participated as an NGO partner to UNEP-MAP.

For us, the most important subject of the meeting was formal approval of the SAP-BIO document. The SAP-BIO (strategic action plans for biological diversity) process was initiated by UNEP-MAP after the SAP (strategic action plans against pollution) and the contracting states requested that national reports be submitted defining the status of marine and coastal biodiversity within their borders. UNEP-MAP also urged the preparation of strategic action plans targeting the national priorities of biodiversity conservation.

A board of selected academicians was subsequently formed by the Turkish Ministry of Environment to draw up the national report and the strategic action plans. None of the Turkish NGOs having field experience in biodiversity research and conservation were considered in establishing that editing board. The reporting process was intended to be participatory and the draft national report was laid open for opinions and contributions from various national institutions and NGOs via three one-day workshops.

While the draft national report drew very serious and detailed criticisms from the workshop participants, GOs and NGOs alike, the strategic action plans were submitted to RAC/SPA without first opening them up for discussion. The contents of those "national" strategic action plans are still a mystery for every party who was kept out of the board of editors, including most of the Ministry of Environment officials. SAD-AFAG has learned only the "titles" of these national strategic action plans through the UNEP-MAP end document of SAP-BIO, which was offered for approval in Catania.

Surprisingly, there was no monk seal conservation action plan among the ones submitted by Turkey. When we asked RAC/SPA about the fate of the Turkish Strategic Action Plan for the Monk Seal – which was declared submitted by the "group of experts" who prepared the SAP-BIO national documents – they replied that if it had been sent by the national focal point, it would exist in the end document. RAC/SPA added that it has no enforcement power over governments.

When we posed the same question to Ministry of Environment officials, they declared that they had no idea whether the action plans had been submitted or not, since the unification of the Environment and Forestry ministries had resulted in personnel changes, and shifting responsibilities.

As a result, Turkey has not included monk seal conservation in that important SAP-BIO process with a relevant national action plan. Also, it seems that RAC/SPA did not express to Turkey any such expectation. We discussed the current dilemma with both RAC/SPA and Turkish Environment Ministry officials in Catania in order to facilitate a meeting between the two.

The monk seal is mentioned in the working document UNEP(DEC)/MED IG. 15/5 "Recommendations for 2004-2005", in the section II.B. The Document recommends the Contracting Parties to invite all concerned parties to hold a high level meeting to define appropriate ways of urgently implementing action for the effective protection of the Mediterranean monk seal, on the basis of the reports of the expert group convened by RAC/SPA in 2002. We have yet to receive any information or documents concerning the results of the Group of Experts meeting convened in

2002. The working document also recommends to the Secretariat that an evaluation report be prepared on the status of the Mediterranean monk seal for submission to the next Meeting of the Contracting Parties. In our meeting with Mr. Chadli Rais, Scientific Director of RAC/SPA, we expressed our willingness to commit the field research experience of SAD-AFAG, developed over the last 16 years in Turkey, to assist research work along those stretches of Mediterranean coast where the status of the monk seal is still unknown. – Yalcin Savas, SAD-AFAG.

Alleged monk seal killers acquitted: case heads to Supreme Court

There have been further developments in the criminal case brought against 4 fish farm operators accused of killing a monk seal in January 2003 on the Karaburun Peninsula, adjacent to the Foça Specially Protected Area [Monk seal deaths, TMG 6 (1): June 2003].

The accused, pleading innocence, appealed prosecutors' demands that they each pay a fine of €200 and were thus obliged to face trial in public court where, if found guilty, they faced a penalty €400 each, plus a €4000 administration fine.

On 23 October 2003, the Urla Criminal Court of First Instance found the four accused – Ilker Akgül, Sedat Celenk, Temel Yildirim and Mehmet Özsu – not guilty and acquitted the men.

Urla's Chief Public Prosecutor, however, has now appealed to Turkey's Supreme Court to reverse the lower court ruling.

Source:

Urla Chief Public Prosecutor heads to Supreme Court for the dead seal. Cumhuriyet newspaper, 13 November 2003.

Fishy film documentaries in Foça

The 3rd International Documentaries Film Festival on Fishermen and the Sea took place in the historic Aegean town of Foça between 4-7 September 2003, organised by the Association of Documentary Filmmakers, the Underwater Research Society, Local Agenda 21 and Foça's Fisheries Cooperative.

Members of the Cooperative took a leading role in the organization of the event this year, its success in previous years convincing them that the Festival is their own.

The Festival kicked off with the concert of a Turkish folk music group, *Yeni Turku*. The most prominent events of the second day were the fishermen's boat races around the ancient harbour and, in the evening, the screening of documentaries in the *Bes kapilar* Castle. These included **Diary of a Fish** (directed by Enis Riza, Head of the Association of Documentary Filmmakers), and **Adrie and Mustafa**, which compares the lives of a Turkish and a Netherlands fishermen (Floor Kooij and Sibel Bilgin).

On 6 September, following the ritual circumcision of the sons of poor fishermen, net mending and fishing line tying competitions were held in the main square.

Fishermen's boat race.

Net-mending competition.

Although organised on a shoestring budget, the Festival has proved a remarkable success both with locals and visitors. Most importantly, perhaps, it has demonstrated to local artesanal fishermen that other people are interested

in their way of life and their concerns. Preparations are already underway for the 4th International Documentaries Film Festival in 2004. For further information, both from filmmakers and members of the public, please contact Yesim Aslan: yesim_aslan@yahoo.com. – Yesim Aslan, SAD-AFAG.

Seal Watch IV

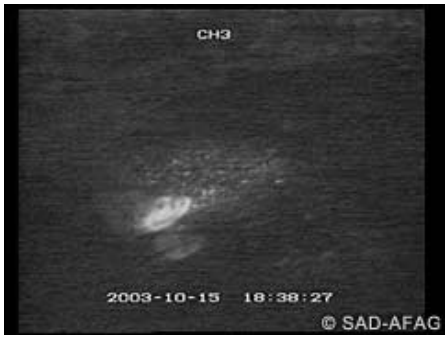
SAD-AFAG's Seal Watch IV project – supported by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, the Prince Bernard Nature Conservation Foundation, the Van Tienhoven Foundation of the Netherlands and also our own limited resources – continues to function at Mordogan, on the Karaburun Peninsula, adjacent to the Foça SPA [see Seal Watch commences on Karaburun, TMG 5 (2): November 2002].

We constructed a portable observation station to record the behaviour of monk seals in the Mordogan cave, with the support of Mordogan Municipality and our summer volunteers.

The new, portable observation station at Mordogan.

Remote-controlled seal-watching.

Observations recorded by the system, installed in August and switched-on in September, show that monk seals continue to use the cave despite human pressures – notably fishing and summer tourism.



A female seal makes an appearance before the cameras.

Two female seals have been recorded using the cave, filling us with the hope that the cameras may catch the unique sight of a monk seal birth. – Nuray Veryeri & Harun Güçlüsoy, SAD-AFAG.

Help for coastal zone management project

SAD-AFAG received a small grant from GEF–SGP Turkey to produce education and public awareness materials about its coastal zone management (SMAP) project, which is being implemented in the following conservation areas: Foça; the adjacent Karaburun Peninsula near Izmir; and Aydincik on Turkey's Mediterranean coast [see Coastal zone management project commences, TMG 5 (1): May 2002 and Turkey's second marine patrolling system launched TMG 6 (1): June 2003].

Ten items will be produced as a result of the project. The first 5 – brochures about monk seals and the work of SAD-AFAG, fisheries, no-fishing-zones and SMAP – are already completed. The remaining items, including 2 posters

about Foça and Karaburun, a monk seal sticker, a board game and a story book for kids are currently being prepared. – Yesim Caglayan, SAD-AFAG.

Autumn ecotour postponed

This autumn's ecotourism project to the Kizilliman Marine Protected Area in the Cilician Basin on Turkey's Mediterranean coast has been postponed until May 2004.

The tour, which started in 2002 as a project to help monk seal conservation efforts in the MPA by providing a source of income to local, artesanal fishers and other stakeholders, is organised by Gruppo Foca Monaca of Italy in association with Dr. Ali Gucu's monk seal conservation team at Middle East Technical University – Institute of Marine Sciences [see Cilicia on my mind and Ecotourism experiment bears fruit, TMG 6 (1): 2003].

GFM asks those who are interested in participating in next May's expedition to write to Gruppo Foca Monaca at grupfoca@tin.it or to visit its web site at: http://www.focamonaca.it.

EndQuote

Subject: Do you sale Monk Seal Meat?

Do you have Seal meat for sale? can I Buy for Food, Import of south Korea?
thank you

Best Regards

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Source: From an email received by CBD-Habitat, Madrid, 8 July 2003

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Cover Story

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

PLUNDERING THE PACIFIC

Paul Koberstein

Editor of Cascadia Times

The cats who run the fishhouse

The personal business interests of federal fishery managers collide with their job to protect endangered wildlife

Imagine the CEO of Weyerhaeuser appointed to run the national forests. As part of the deal, he gets to keep his old job. Federal law wouldn't allow it, of course. It's a simple conflict of interest. But when it comes to the folks who regulate ocean fishing, conflicts of interest are not only permissible, they're a regular part of the game.

Consider Sean Martin of Hawai'i, and the four hats he wears. As a fisherman, Martin earns a living from the sea. He owns a business that sells equipment so others can, too. As an activist, he heads a trade group that is fighting environmental regulations to protect endangered sea turtles. And as a regulator, he recently voted to open fishing in areas and ways that have been proven harmful to endangered species.

Fisherman, businessman, regulator and activist: Sean Martin meets the press in 2000 after a federal judge closes longline fishing to protect endangered sea turtles.

Martin and his business partner, Jim Cook – himself a council member in 1990s – have had it both ways: they help make the rules, and they profit from the rules. And on occasion, Martin and Cook have been prosecuted for breaking those very rules.

Martin is one of 13 members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (known as "Wespac"), a position Cook held throughout the 1990s. Congress created the council in 1976 as one of eight that govern U.S. waters in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific. Wespac governs close to 50 percent of U.S. waters, an area of ocean as large as the other councils' areas combined.

Congress put three of the councils in charge of the Pacific Ocean: the Western Pacific Council, based in Honolulu; the North Pacific Council in Anchorage; and the Pacific Council in Portland. The Council member's job, which pays $380 per day, is to set the seasons and allocate the catch among various interest groups. They must also protect the environment, guard against overfishing, prevent the killing of endangered species and reduce the immense amount of wasted catch.

But with billions of dollars worth of fish to divvy up, the councils have repeatedly helped to deplete fish stocks and to kill massive numbers of endangered animals as they voted for more fishing. If the oceans belong to everyone, should the fishing industry be allowed to claim it as its own? The industry thinks so, but others disagree.

None of the 38 members on the three Pacific Ocean councils represents conservation interests. In their 27-year history, none of the three councils has ever had a representative from the conservation community. The overwhelming majority on each council has always represented groups that are clamoring for more and more fish.

This year, the Bush administration was given a chance to fill a vacancy on the Pacific council. Instead of picking a qualified conservationist or biologist, the administration packed the council with its fourth charter boat operator. Some say it's no coincidence that in September, the council voted to increase the charter industry's catch of

bocaccio, the most depleted Pacific stock.

In 1976, Congress reasoned that the fishers would be better than anyone else at regulating ocean fisheries because of their experience at sea. But it turned out that Congress hired cats to run the fishhouse. Congress set up the system for plundering.

Since 1976, the number of stocks listed as overfished has skyrocketed from 14 to at least 86. With the status of hundreds more stocks not known, odds are many more are in trouble, says biologist Mark Hixon, Ph.D., of Oregon State University. And with many of the so-called “healthy” stocks themselves mired in a deep decline, the problem is likely to get worse.

The councils claim the failed policies of the past are gone. But the number of overfished species has increased three of the last four years, and has climbed 25 percent since 1997. The councils continue to allow fishing on even the most depleted stocks, and some stocks are in such bad shape that recovery is a going to take 100 years or more. After thoroughly reviewing America’s troubled oceans, the Pew Oceans Commission recently called for an end to the current system of an industry that governs itself.

“The councils are acting like the tobacco industry did with the denial of health effects,” says Mark Powell of the Ocean Conservancy. “It took a long time to provide the evidence, but common sense always told you there was a problem.”

In June 2003, the Secretary of Commerce appointed Sean Martin to a seat on the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. The appointment brought the number of commercial fishermen on the council to four. Martin is a longliner, a segment of the industry that pursues tuna and swordfish on the high seas and in the process kills endangered sea turtles and sea birds. He is also co-owner, with Jim Cook, of Pacific Ocean Producers, a leading fishing equipment supply company. Cook is chairman of the council’s advisory committees, and is a former council chair.

Almost every time a fishing vessel sails out of Honolulu, Martin and Cook make money. They sell the bait, the ice, and the gear. They have a personal stake in the outcome of almost any fishing regulation they help write.

So will the creatures of the sea that interact with commercial fishing. Longlining has played a major role in the decimation of leatherback sea turtles over the last two decades. Populations crashed in the 1990s by 95 percent at the same time swordfish longlining boomed. Longlining has also harmed four other endangered sea turtle species – the green, loggerhead, hawksbill and olive ridley – and two types of albatross.

The leatherback may now be just 10 years away from extinction, biologists say. In June 2000, the scientific journal, *Nature*, published an article warning about the imminent leatherback extinction and citing commercial longline fishing around Hawai‘i as a leading cause. “If these turtles are to be saved, immediate action is needed to minimize mortality through fishing and to maximize hatchling production. We believe that fishing practices in the Pacific must be changed to save marine biodiversity,” the authors wrote.

The longliners fasten thousands of baited hooks to lines that extend for up to 60 miles. When turtles cross the lines, their long pectoral fins can get tangled, causing some to drown. Others bite the bait and get hauled on deck. Dead or alive, these turtles are tossed back as just so much industrial waste. Studies show about a third of the injured turtles die.

It didn’t take long for Martin to participate in a decision that had potential to fatten his wallet at the expense of the leatherback. On Sept. 23, 2003, the council faced the question of whether to reopen swordfishing in the very waters where leatherbacks are known to migrate. Biologists told the council the rule would harm 144 sea turtles per year, of which more than 40 would be leatherbacks. It would allow longliners to employ 75 percent of the number of hooks they had set during the boom years of 1994-1998.

On a motion by Martin, the council voted 8-5 to reopen the fishery. One council member suggested Martin had violated the council’s conflict of interest rules, according to two witnesses. But executive director Kitty M. Simonds says the council’s attorney determined that no conflict of interest rules were broken. Yet the vote has provoked continuing furor among conservationists.

“It’s a big conflict of interest,” said Linda Paul, a Honolulu attorney with Hawai‘i Audubon. “Martin had no business making the motion or voting for it. This council is industry-controlled, managed by short-term economic interests.”

“The council is rife with conflicts of interest,” says Rick Gaffney, a prominent recreational fisherman and president of the Hawai‘i Fishing and Boating Association. “That is one of the reasons it’s been such a failure.” Gaffney also said the council favors a tiny handful of people while “completely ignoring the fishing interests of the most valuable fishing

industry in Hawai'i, recerational fishing." In doing so, Wespac has threatened the fragile Northwestern Hawaiian Islands ecosystem. "It's being managed improperly," said Gaffney, a strong supporter of the reserve.

The Sept. 23 vote may also lead to violations of the Endangered Species Act. "It would authorize a far higher number of sea turtle takes than the scientific record supports," says William Hogarth, assistant administrator of NOAA Fisheries (the federal agency in charge of ocean policies; until recently it changed its name from the National Marine Fisheries Service, though it still sometimes calls itself that).

The Western Pacific council dismisses concerns that it has a track record of advocating environmentally damaging fishing plans.

With about 1.5 million square miles under its jurisdiction, the Western Pacific council governs 50 percent of oceans under U.S. control, an area known as the Exclusive Economic Zone, or EEZ. It also controls fishing access to as much as 70 percent of all U.S. coral reefs. For the last 27 years, Kitty Simonds has been executive director of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, and before that served as an aide to Sen. Hiram Fong, Hawai'i's first member of Congress.

Wespac claims it is devoted to protecting the environment. As a recent article in its newsletter, *Pacific Island Fishery News*, stated, "The ocean and its resources define our way of life in the Pacific Islands. Ensuring that these resources remain healthy for future generations of US Pacific Islanders is the work of the Western Pacific Management Council."

But others say the Western Pacific council has built fisheries at the expense of protecting the environment. The council is now trying to expand commercial fishing for bottomfish and coral into protected areas within the relatively pristine Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This 1,200-mile long archipelago between the Main Hawaiian Islands and Kure Atoll is the primary breeding grounds of the Hawaiian monk seal, one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world. At the same time, the council is trying to undermine the Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve created by executive order, with broad public participation, in 2001.

Over the last two decades, scientists say, the Western Pacific council and NOAA Fisheries helped push the monk seal and the leatherback sea turtle toward the brink of extinction. Yet the council vehemently denies any major role in the demise of these species. In fact, the council is pursuing ways to resume fisheries banned by the courts for their destructive impacts on monk seals and sea turtles.

And yet, when it comes to its environmental record, the Western Pacific council is not necessarily out of step with other federal fishery councils that govern the Pacific Ocean. An investigation by Cascadia Times shows that the other councils have created similar nightmares in their own backyards. For example:

- The Pacific council is presiding over the continuing disastrous collapse of rockfish, its once most valuable fishery. With 82 groundfish stocks to manage, the council has assessed only 20, and has declared nine stocks to be overfished with at least three more approaching an overfished condition. The Pacific council is letting fishers kill species that have declined by as much as 96 percent from historical levels. In June it approved rules allowing the destruction of endangered sea turtles in its own longlining fisheries. The council also has ignored commercial fishing's ongoing permanent damage to coral ecosystems offshore of California, Oregon and Washington.
- The North Pacific council recently refused to slow down the industrial-scale fishing and the loss of Alaska's rich coral heritage. It has presided over fisheries in Alaska that apparently have taken food away from the endangered Steller sea lion, aiding in its collapse over the last several decades. The walleye pollock fishery has systematically reduced the abundance of this main sea lion prey by approximately sixty percent.

A 2002 report by the National Research Council concluded that the effects of fishing cannot be rejected as a cause for the almost ninety percent decline in western Alaska, and that the current sea lion population decline may be due to a combination of factors. The report recommended an experimental design to examine these issues. The experimental design would close substantial portions of fishing areas in prime sea lion foraging habitat, similar to a system of closed areas required by NOAA Fisheries in 2000, at least until a congressional rider changed the rules. The experimental design has yet to be implemented.

The Northern council says its groundfish are in good shape, but it has never defined a threshold below which it defines an "overfished" species. Of 191 groundfish species, the council has assessed only 21. The condition of the other 170 stocks, or about 89 percent, is unknown. A 2001 analysis by the Ocean Conservancy said some other stocks "did not appear to be in as good shape as the subset the Council assessed." In addition, overfishing on crab in the Aleutians and Bering Sea has led to fishing closures.

The definition of terms like "overfishing" depends on whom you ask.

“None of the fishery resources that we manage are overfished,” Simonds told the Honolulu Star Bulletin in 2000.

As Simonds spoke, the lobster fishery in the pristine Northwestern Hawaiian Islands had just been ordered closed by NOAA Fisheries in the wake of a federal court ruling protecting the monk seal [see TMG, Hawaiian News, *passim*].

Between 1982 and 1992, the catch was nearly 4 million animals above the quota and then it crashed. They caught these lobsters in or near areas now designated as “critical habitat” for the Hawaiian monk seal, which was added to the Endangered Species List in 1976.

At the same time, large numbers of seal pups were dying of starvation. From the monk seals’ point of view, humans were stealing their food. Those humans included the skipper of a vessel owned by Jim Cook and Sean Martin. At the time, Cook was a member – and soon to be chairman – of the Western Pacific council.

Carroll Cox, then a special agent for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Honolulu, told Cascadia Times in a recent interview that Cook was fined $40,000 for the illegal harvest of 1,200 undersized juvenile spiny and slipper lobsters, the illegal harvest of 1,300 females with eggs, and failing to maintain accurate and complete lobster catch reports. This was the same lobster fishery blamed for the catastrophic decline of endangered Hawaiian monk seals.

Cox says that in 1993 and 1995, NOAA Fisheries twice fined Martin and Cook’s Pacific Ocean Producers $5,000 for failing to file commercial fishing logbooks. The logbooks contain important records on the killing of fish and other marine animals. In 1999, the company was fined $10,000 for fishing within the monk seal’s range in a protected area near the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Rick Gaffney, the recreational fishing advocate, said “I don’t know any other place in America where someone who is tasked with management of a resource and who violates the rules is allowed to continue.”

In the Western Pacific, the people who write the rules don’t always obey them. And sometimes they just change them. In 1997, the Western Pacific council – with Cook as chairman – voted to allow a “retain-all” fishery for lobsters. In most other places in the country it is illegal to kill egg-bearing females and undersized juveniles.

“They were like thieves in the night,” Cox says.

“To me,” says Achitoff of Earthjustice, “they are just a bunch of pirates, lining their pockets on the public teat.”

NOAA closed lobster seasons in the islands several times in the 1990s because of potential overfishing, and on June 26, 2000, NOAA closed them again. Lobster fishing has been closed ever since. The 2000 Executive Order establishing the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve made those closures permanent.

When Congress created the councils in 1976, it granted them a certain amount of autonomy. The Western Pacific council has repeatedly pushed against the limits of that authority, and has resented efforts by the courts, Congress and NOAA Fisheries to rein it in.

For example, in the late 1990s, the Western Pacific council vigorously fought proposals to ban the practice of removing shark fins at sea and dumping the live animal overboard to drown. The practice outraged many people across the country, in Congress and in the Department of Commerce – where NOAA Fisheries is headquartered – as inhumane.

But the folks who work for the council felt otherwise. At one point, Simonds, the Western Pacific council executive director and a federal employee, personally lobbied the Hawai‘i Legislature against legislation banning the practice. Her use of her federal office to lobby the state raised some eyebrows among conservationists but apparently failed to trigger any official inquiry into whether her actions were appropriate for a federal employee. Jim Cook, the former swordfish longliner who during those years served as the Western Pacific council chairman, lobbied Congress against passing its own ban. Cook said a proposal to ban sharkfinning “calls into question the integrity and authority of not only the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council but all regional councils.”

For Cook and other Hawai‘i longliners, sharkfinning was a $1 million a year business. Asian markets paid $50 a pound or more for fins to make shark fin soup. Most of the fins came from blue sharks caught accidentally in the pursuit of tuna and swordfish. In 2000, both Congress and the Hawai‘i Legislature passed laws banning the sale of shark fins unless accompanied by a corresponding shark carcass.

But the sharkfinning firestorm didn’t stir nearly the controversy as the fight over swordfishing and sea turtles. From the beginning, business partners Jim Cook and Sean Martin were involved in that fight in nearly every possible way.

Leatherback sea turtle.

As large as a car, leatherbacks can weigh up to 2,000 pounds and measure 9 feet in length. They are the largest, deepest diving and most wide-ranging of all sea turtles. Leatherbacks nest on tropical beaches in places like Mexico, Costa Rica and Papua New Guinea, and have been known to travel thousands of miles to feed exclusively on jellyfish in the cooler latitudes of the North Pacific. One study estimated that they consume their body weight in jellyfish per day.

Longline and gill-net fisheries killed at least 1,500 female leatherbacks per year in the Pacific during the 1990s, according to Nature's "conservative estimates." They said "a long-lived species like this cannot withstand such high rates" of fishing mortality. The vessels responsible, Nature said, included Asian and Central and South American boats, as well as Hawaiian longline fisheries.

In 1980, scientists estimated the Pacific's female leatherback sea turtle population at 91,000. But soon after swordfish longlining got going in the Pacific, the leatherback population plummeted, says Scott Eckert, a leading sea turtle biologist. The Mexican population was dropping by 22 percent each year. "Their slide toward extinction has been the most rapid decline for any significant large vertebrate population in history," he says.

But in the opinion of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, there were more important things to worry about than an endangered sea turtle. For example, in the Winter 2000 issue of its newsletter, the council noted that swordfishing closures ordered by a federal court for the benefit of sea turtles cost the industry $15 million a year. "It is not in the best interest to have Hawai'i's catch levels reduced at this critical time," the council said in an article. It called the court decisions to protect sea turtles "an affront to the council process."

The council also protested NOAA Fisheries' 2001 ruling that the longline fishery jeopardized the leatherback's existence. "After reviewing the (ruling) one is left with the unsettling conclusion that the data and rationale have been manipulated to fit a pre-conceived jeopardy opinion for leatherbacks …"

The council's critics say it often acts as though it is a subsidiary of the Hawai'i Longline Association, a trade group headed by Sean Martin, its president and a Western Pacific council member. The Hawai'i Longline Association called NOAA Fisheries' ruling "faith based population dynamics" and "junk science." It said NOAA Fisheries was engaged in a "shameful pattern of sham actions."

Hawai'i's longliners grew fourfold between 1987 and 1990, and within a decade annual landings had soared to 13.2 million pounds, worth $21 million. Much of this increase occurred after longline vessels decimated Atlantic populations of targeted fish and moved to Hawaiian waters. Cook and Martin held two of the 164 swordfishing longline permits in Hawai'i.

Many threats have caused the leatherback's collapse in the Pacific, including the theft of eggs from nests. But the authors of the Nature article found that adult females were getting lost at alarmingly high numbers in the general area of the Pacific where the Hawai'i longliners were setting their hooks.

While this sea turtle slaughter was taking place in the 1990s, Cook was chair of the Western Pacific council's Pelagics Standing Committee, which made recommendations on the yearly swordfish catch and corresponding sea turtle kill. Cook was also a member of the Western Pacific council, which voted on those recommendations. And like his partner Sean Martin, Cook stood to personally benefit from votes allowing him to fish in ways that kill sea turtles.

NOAA Fisheries knew as early as 1982 that longline gear off Hawai'i accidentally captured leatherbacks. In a 1991 biological opinion, it authorized the annual taking of 25 sea turtles, with no more than one death of leatherback and one death for two other endangered turtles harmed by longliners, the olive ridley and the green. And it limited the longliners to 1.4 million hooks.

But the longliners weren't paying attention or didn't care, and apparently neither did the Western Pacific council. In 1991, longline fishermen in the waters off Hawai'i set approximately 12.3 million hooks – more than 10 times the limit set by NOAA Fisheries. They caught 9.9 million pounds of swordfish, 5.8 million pounds of various large tuna – and, according to the best estimates of NOAA Fisheries, 752 endangered or threatened sea turtles, of which about 250 were believed to have died.

Rather than battle the Western Pacific council and its influential longliners, NOAA Fisheries authorized the capture of 754 sea turtles in 1994, including 244 leatherbacks. But the longliners caught 993 that year. Over the next several years the agency authorized increasing numbers of turtle captures or killings. In 1999, it allowed the longliners to capture 955 sea turtles, in spite of its own conclusion that this would jeopardize the continued existence of the sea

turtle species.

As early as 1994, the Ocean Conservancy (known then as the Center for Marine Conservation) warned NOAA Fisheries about the need to protect the turtles.

Finally, in 1999, with sea turtle populations collapsing around the Pacific, two groups – the Ocean Conservancy and the Turtle Island Restoration Network – sued NOAA Fisheries for allowing longliners to kill the turtles in violation of the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. Though the lawsuit did not name the Western Pacific council as a defendant (the council cannot be sued over its regulations because they technically are just recommendations that are enforced by NOAA Fisheries), the council has always expressed its own "continuing opposition" to rules protecting the turtles.

"We told the court that these turtles are heading for extinction and you can't keep authorizing the longliners to take more and more turtles," said Paul Achitoff, the attorney for Earthjustice who filed the lawsuit. "Their analysis just didn't make any sense."

The federal judge agreed, issuing a sweeping injunction that closed millions of square miles in the Pacific to swordfish longlining. Soon after, NOAA Fisheries finally announced that the fishery was likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the green, leatherback and loggerhead turtles.

In response, the Hawai'i Longline Association, the trade group headed by its president, Sean Martin, filed at least three legal actions with the intent to reverse the agency decision, calling it "deeply flawed, clearly contrary to the best science available, unlawful, and detrimental to the best interests of the species NOAA Fisheries is required to protect."

The Hawai'i longliners argue that most of the leatherbacks are killed by foreign fishing fleets, and that their own impacts are miniscule in comparison. "Because the (U.S.) fishery is so highly regulated, and so small in number, it neither could cause the existing population decline, nor, through further regulation, can it reverse the trend," the longliners' association said in court papers.

The group noted that Asian and South American vessels kill many more sea turtles than the Hawaiian vessels do, and employ far more destructive methods. The Hawaiian longliners say that a shutdown of the U.S. fleet will result in more turtle deaths, not less.

Interestingly, Sean Martin and Jim Cook helped build the very fisheries they now criticize. According to the web site of their company, Pacific Ocean Producers has installed more than 350 longline systems since 1985 in Hawai'i (125 systems), Tahiti (75 systems), Samoa, Fiji, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Guam, Saipan, New Zealand, New Caledonia, Australia and California. "Pacific Ocean Producers has played a major role in developing fisheries in the South Pacific islands," the web site says.

Of course, just because other nations kill sea turtles doesn't make it right for Americans to do it. Should we expect others to do anything until the U.S. takes the lead?

"I blame the U.S. government for failing to create a fishery here that's a model for the rest of the world," says Todd Steiner of the Turtle Island Restoration Network, a conservation group. "Until we clean up our own act we're not in any positions to put forward any progressive fishery plan for the rest of the world. That's what were trying to do with this litigation. And I don't buy their claim that U.S. vessels are treating sea turtles with more respect than foreign vessels."

In August 2003, a federal court in Washington, D.C., struck down the swordfishing ban on procedural grounds, granting the longliners at least a temporary victory. In October, another ruling gave NOAA Fisheries six months to redo its biological opinion.

None of this implies, of course, any criminal activity. From the beginning, Congress explicitly exempted fishery council members from federal conflict-of-interest laws.

Congress wanted to let the industry govern itself. Conservation groups and scientists participate in advisory panel discussions but have no seat at the table when the councils meet. Members of the public who attend council meetings may be discouraged by the acronyms and the difficult science (See "How to Speak 'Fisheries'").

The fishery councils make little effort to translate their information to words the public can easily understand, says Michael Hirschfield, a scientist with Oceana, a conservation group. The councils don't publish simple summaries of stock assessments that would help the public more easily understand what is happening to their fisheries. Even experts have trouble deciphering the fishery councils' reports. "I think its outrageous that the people who are

responsible for managing our fisheries make it so difficult for ordinary citizens or anyone else to get accurate clear information about how our fish are doing," Hirschfield says.

The system seems custom built for industry insiders only. A recent study of the nation's eight fishery councils found that 49 percent of all council members appointed between 1990 and 2001 represented commercial fishing interests. Another 33 percent represented recreational fishing interests, according to the paper written by Tom Okey (a researcher at the University of British Columbia) and published in the academic journal Marine Policy. These numbers do not include the state and federal officials who are statutory members of the councils.

Between them, the two prongs of the fishing industry controlled 82 percent of the appointed members' votes. The other 18 percent of the seats were held by biologists, social scientists, environmentalists, conservationists, consumer affairs experts, and tribal representatives. (The three Pacific Ocean councils have never had a conservation or consumer affairs expert on their rosters, though the Pacific council does have one tribal member.)

Okey says granting the fishing industry such dominance over ocean policy and management decisions has led to unsustainable fishing, degraded marine ecosystems, and impoverished fishing communities.

"Management systems tend to favor big money interests when they are structured to be influenced by those interests," he says.

"We have an antiquated structure with a narrow view of fisheries that is not up to the task of rebuilding species or protecting endangered species like turtles," says Kate Wing of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "It was not designed to fix those problems."

Until this year, Hans Radtke, an economist, served as chair of the Pacific council. When his term expired, Commerce Secretary Don Evans filled the seat with a charter boat operator.

The Pacific council already had three charter boat operators on its roster. Now it has four, and still no conservationists, biologists or industry outsiders. With two other recreational fishers on the council, that one industry controls a clear majority of the votes.

"Charter boat operators make up less than 10 percent of recreational fishing trips in the ocean but yet for some reason they are very heavily represented on the council," Radtke says. "This representation by the one industry does not make sense. The general public, whoever that might be, is not there anymore."

Just because a council member gets a paycheck from fishing does not automatically mean his or her votes will go contrary to good conservation, says Peter Huhtala, conservation director for the Pacific Marine Conservation Coalition in Astoria. "But you look at the track record of what's happened to say the Pacific council, there's got to be a problem."

That track record, says Zeke Grader of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, has been poor. "In both New England and the West Coast, of course, the council process allowed, even encouraged, the near total collapse of those groundfish fisheries," he says. "Even among the less publicized fisheries there are lots of stocks that are overfished or on the verge of collapse. Stock rebuilding programs have had spotty success, and frankly provide too little too late.

"Prevention of a collapse in the first place would have saved fishing dependent families, jobs and communities from intense economic dislocation that should never have happened. Even if you quibble with the definitions of 'overfished', the fact is inescapable that today nearly half of the fisheries under council management are in piss poor shape."

Commercial fishing is a dangerous living. Lives are lost every year as crews face violent weather and long hours. This vessel fishes out of Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

Much of this had been due to politics, particularly as played by the powerful Republican Senator from Alaska, Ted Stevens and two powerful Democrats, Hawai'i's Daniel Inouye and Sen. Fritz Hollings. As members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Stevens, Inouye, and Hollings have a say over every dollar the government spends and make special appropriations directly to fishery councils. For example, Inouye secured $230,000 from the 2000 budget specifically to fund the development of Wespac's "coral reef ecosystem" fishery plan. According to a former high-ranking government official, "They are the most

micromanaged agencies in the federal bureaucracy." Over the years Inouye has funneled many millions of dollars more related to the council's work, including $5 million for "economic disaster assistance" for the longline fishing industry that helped devastate endangered sea turtles.

In 2000, Inouye — citing Wespac's plans for its "coral reef ecosystem" fishery — convinced Congress to pass a bill requiring Clinton to place the planned Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Reserve under the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce, Wespac's home agency. This sparked fears among Hawai'i observers that, as a result of backing from the powerful Senator, the council would be able continue its legacy of environmental destruction, unchecked, in some of the most vulnerable areas of the Western Pacific.

This summer Stevens pushed a rider that would stop NOAA Fisheries from conducting scientific research on deep sea coral habitat off Alaska until 2005 (when he presumably would ascend to chairman of the powerful Commerce committee, which oversees ocean fisheries, and from where he will be able to exert even more influence on behalf of the industry).

In the past, Stevens pushed similar riders saying that the Endangered Species Act shall not apply to the Steller sea lion. The sea lion plummeted as bottom-trawlers scooped up pollock in huge quantities.

With Stevens and Inouye looking over their shoulders, the bureaucrats at NOAA Fisheries have given "a rubber stamp" of approval to council decisions, says Josh Eagle of the Stanford Fisheries Policy Project at Stanford Law School. "The system was set up by Congress with the intention that (NOAA Fisheries) would have a very small, limited role with respect to overseeing the councils. As the system is set up, the choice is being made by fishermen, who are going to err on the side of not giving up income."

Shutting down a fishery in one location often leads them to go fish someplace else. So when the federal court closed a million square miles of high seas to swordfishing to save the sea turtle, the fleet didn't just give up. They sailed right through a loophole in the court decision.

Longliners discovered that if they shifted their operations to California or Mexico, they could escape the narrow terms of the court ruling. Soon after, at least 40 longline boats from in Hawai'i began unloading their catches in California ports. Pacific Ocean Producers, the ship chandlery operated by Sean Martin and Jim Cook, opened a warehouse in Ensenada, Mexico, to supply them with gear, ice and bait.

The quantity of swordfish landed at San Pedro, Calif., increased from 1.5 million pounds in 1999 to 2.6 million pounds in 2000.

"Nobody thought the response of the industry would be to just move outside the geographic scope of that injunction," said Deborah Sivas of Earthjustice. "We have the exact same issues here."

"Whenever there have been regulations, they moved to where there weren't regulations," said Brendan Cummings, an attorney with the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity, one of the plaintiffs in sea turtle litigation.

NOAA Fisheries scientists found that longliners out of California appear to be killing sea turtles in the same numbers as they did in Hawai'i, yet the agency at first refused to shut them down.

So once again, conservation groups went back to court. After an initial setback in district court, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted them a favorable ruling in August 2003.

"NOAA Fisheries knew they were violating the Endangered Species Act, and even had observers on board observing the take of turtles. But NOAA Fisheries was unwilling to take enforcement action – either prosecution under the ESA, or by imposing Hawai'i-style regulations," Cummings said.

This summer, the Pacific council had an opportunity to impose Hawai'i-style regulations on the migrating longliners. Instead the Pacific council voted to let them continue catching swordfish and killing sea turtles.

The Pacific council's action may not stand. It prompted a pointed response from William Hogarth, assistant director of fisheries at NOAA Fisheries, who indicated the agency would soon overturn the Pacific council's decision — perhaps because it has finally grown weary of losing lawsuits.

"It is difficult to understand how the council chose to propose measures that clearly do not provide adequate protection for endangered and threatened sea turtles," Hogarth said in a letter to the judge. "Nonetheless, that is the situation, which disappoints me greatly."

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Cover Story

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PLUNDERING THE PACIFIC

Paul Koberstein

Editor of Cascadia Times

Who runs the Pacific Ocean?

The 1996 Magnuson-Stevens Act established eight regional councils, including three in the Pacific, comprised of "individuals who, by reason of their occupational or other experience, scientific expertise, or training, are knowledgeable regarding conservation and management, or the commercial or recreational harvest, of the fishery resources of the geographical area concerned."

Among the 38 members of the three councils that govern the Pacific, 22 represent commercial or recreational fishing interests, or about 58 percent. Another 15 represent state, federal or tribal agencies. The law does not require any of the members to represent conservation interests, and none do.

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council	**Pacific Fishery Management Council**	**North Pacific Fishery Management Council**
Headquarters: Honolulu, Hawai'i	**Headquarters:** Portland, Oregon	**Headquarters:** Anchorage, Alaska
Jurisdiction: 200 miles surrounding Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands; and Palmyra Atoll, Kingman Reef and Midway, Johnston,Wake, Jarvis, Howland and Baker Islands; high seas	**Jurisdiction:** 200 miles off California, Oregon and Washington; high seas	**Jurisdiction:** 200 miles off Alaska in the Pacific Ocean, Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea; high seas
VOTING MEMBERS: Of 13 council members, 8 represent commercial or recreational fishing.	**VOTING MEMBERS:** Of 14 council members, 8 represent commercial or recreational fishing.	**VOTING MEMBERS:** Of 11 council members, 6 represent commercial fishing.
		
Federal: 1 member **Commercial Fishing:** 4 members **Recreational Fishing:** 4 members **State:** 4 members	**Federal:** 1 member **Commercial Fishing:** 2 members **Recreational Fishing:** 6 members **State:** 4 members **Tribal:** 1 member	**Federal:** 1 member **Commercial Fishing:** 6 members **State:** 3 members **Other:** 1 member
Note: State members are from Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands.	**Note:** State members are from California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho.	**Note:** State members are from Alaska, Washington and Oregon.

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Western Pacific council pushes plan to quash historic coral reserve

Council puts corals, spiny lobster and rare monk seal at risk so a few can profit

"I am writing to ask for your help in reversing an '11th-hour decision' by former President Clinton that will have a devastating economic impact on the fishing industry of Hawai'i," Linda Lingle, then a Republican candidate for governor of Hawai'i, wrote in a letter two years ago to U.S. Commerce Secretary Don Evans.

An endangered Hawaiian monk seal swims near its home in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

That decision had created the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, which protects up to 70 percent of the coral reefs in the U.S., culminating a century of preservation initiated by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, or Wespac, headed by executive director Kitty M. Simonds, had convinced Lingle to send Evans a letter calling for the annulment of the Executive Orders which established the Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by *Cascadia Times*, was written by the Western Pacific council as part of its campaign to undermine the historic reserve, and appears to be evidence that the council was willing even to distort the facts to achieve this end.

But seven months later, Lingle determined that the reserve had widespread support after hearing from a range of fishermen, fish processors, Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, scientists and ordinary citizens who had united their communities to persuade the White House to protect the distant islands from the management abuses of Wespac and NOAA Fisheries. On Oct. 10, 2001, she sent a second letter to Evans, retracting her opposition to the reserve and urging him to go forward with it. She said she based her previous comment on a "less than complete understanding" of the issue. "After listening to individuals on both sides of the issue, I now urge you to allow the Executive Orders to stand…"

Lingle, now the governor of Hawai'i, learned that Clinton's order was no 11th-hour decision at all, but a well-considered judgment overwhelmingly supported by Hawaiians. Over the past three years, 26 federal and state hearings and scoping sessions have been held on the management of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The public has responded with an outpouring of 52,000 letters of support for strong conservation measures. Only a tiny fraction — about 1 percent — of those who made a comment opposed the ecosystem reserve.

The council also told Lingle that the ecosystem reserve "will cause great negative socioeconomic impacts to the state of Hawai'i." They also said it could destroy all existing fisheries in federal waters off Hawai'i that haven't already been shut down by the courts for their impacts on endangered species.

None of this was true. The reserve allows existing fisheries to continue as they are. As for the economic impacts, they would be miniscule. No one fishes for lobsters anymore in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Thanks to the council's mismanagement, the small fishery was already closed, preventing the six Northwestern lobster vessels from setting traps. Only about nine boats participate in the commercial bottomfish fishery there. The Executive Order grandfathers in the existing and very small cadre of bottomfishers and the handful of recreational fishers who brave the rough northern waters.

To those who follow the Western council closely, information that it intentionally misled the soon-to-be-elected governor came as no surprise. They say Simonds has been misleading the public and policy-makers for years as she has attempted to maintain the healthy stream of appropriations flowing to her small Council for the "management" of NWHI fisheries, while catering to the handful of fishers who dominate the council and who over the years have played a major role in nearly driving to extinction two of the most endangered large animals on the planet: leatherback sea turtle and the Hawaiian monk seal.

"This is a story of a very small number of people holding 50 percent of U.S. ocean resources hostage," says Stephanie Fried, a senior scientist for Environmental Defense, a conservation group. "It's also a story of a popular uprising led by Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, fishers, and environmentalists, all working together to protect one of the last great ecosystems on earth."

Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, serves marlin to Commerce Secretary Don Evans.

After Bush took office, Simonds stepped up her campaign to dismantle the new Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. With each fishery shut down by the reserve, the council stands to lose federal dollars appropriated for managing each of those fisheries. Her agenda called for maintaining the council's cash flow by setting up a commercial industry to collect deep sea corals, and to harvest fish in the fragile and shallow coral reef areas surrounding remote atolls and islands, under a "coral reef ecosystem" fishery plan. The Executive Order creating the reserve does not allow these actions, but Simonds and the council are now trying to weaken the order.

"It is such a perverse thought that the result of President Clinton's actions to protect the coral reefs of the Northwestern Hawaiian islands would result in industrial exploitation and harvesting in these very coral reefs," says Ellen Athas, who worked at the Clinton White House on ocean issues.

"The coral reefs take so long to grow — you look at 4 inches and it's taken 400 years to get there. Scientists tell us what magic they contain for us."

When the White House looked at the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands for the first time, Athas said it saw an area rich in resources in a relatively pristine condition. "The only people who would battle against it are maybe a dozen fishermen. We never get the opportunity anymore to see these places. Other places everything is developed, the hotels are in place and the corals are all gone."

Athas is not alone in finding it unfathomable to think that anyone would oppose the reserve other than those who play power politics or are somehow connected to the jewelry industry.

Of course, many people would find it unfathomable to learn what Wespac did to the Hawaiian monk seal.

The seal's main breeding grounds lie in the most isolated archipelago on earth, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, stretching 1,200 nautical miles from the Main Hawai'i Islands to Kure Atoll.

The Northwestern Islands are also home to millions of seabirds and rare green sea turtles, as well as 70 percent of all coral reefs in the U.S.

During the last two decades, a frightening crash in the number of monk seal pups has put the species in jeopardy. In a word, the pups are starving.

In the 1800s, hunters decimated the population. In 1909, Republican President Theodore Roosevelt issued an Executive Order to protect the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and establish a wildlife refuge system there. Since it was listed as endangered in 1976, the seal's population crashed once again. In the 1970s, about 90 percent of seal pups survived to adulthood. Two decades later, only about 10 percent survived.

Biologists say the total population is now only 1,400. The monk seal is now considered to be highly endangered to the point that a natural catastrophe could lead to extinction.

In 1999, three conservation groups — Greenpeace Foundation, Center for Biological Diversity, and Turtle Island Restoration Network — successfully sued to stop Wespac from allowing the small but high-impact 6-boat lobster fishery to continue to decimate lobsters. The groups also cited the council's high-impact but small bottomfish fishery around the islands as a cause. "The data strongly suggest that the [lobster] fishery contributes to the starvation of the monk seals," the federal judge in the case ruled.

The council denied — and denies today — that its lobster fisheries starved the monk seal pups. But a growing number of scientific reports say otherwise.

In 1983, the federal monk seal recovery team called for studies to determine how much of the seal's food was being caught by fishers. In 1991, biologists with the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission called on NOAA Fisheries to halt the lobster catch, and it did. In 1993, NOAA Fisheries reopened lobster fishing, and, 424,000 lobsters were caught.

Between 1997 and 2000 the annual lobster catch ranged between 200,000 and 300,000.

During these years, as monk seal populations plummeted, the Marine Mammal Commission again and again repeated its call for a halt to the lobster fishery. They wrote more than twenty letters between 1991 and 2000 expressing deep concern. But the Western council kept responding by saying, “Bugger off — there is no scientific proof here,” says Paul Achitoff, an Earthjustice attorney who represented the conservation groups. “They said they weren’t going to take any action to protect the monk seal.”

In 1999, the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team, concerned about the declining colony at French Frigate Shoals, recommended closing the lobster fishery for three years to allow stocks to recover.

The council refused that request. Instead, it set a lobster quota of up to 200,000. The council emphatically stated that the lobster had not been overfished. But in April 2000, NOAA Fisheries shut lobster fishing down, and has not reopened it since. It noted a lack of appreciable rebuilding despite significant reductions in fishing. In December 2000, NOAA attributed the decline “to some degree” to the lack of lobsters and starvation.

At the same time, a federal judge ruled the agency had failed to fulfill its “rigorous” obligation to insure that lobster fishing did not jeopardize the seals.

The lesson for fishery managers, says Achitoff, is that they “shouldn’t be authorizing a fishery to take food away from endangered species.”

In December 2000, almost a century after Roosevelt’s visionary protection measures, President Clinton designated the islands as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. As Lingle wrote in her second letter to Evans, Hawai‘i’s fishermen, native cultural practitioners, and ordinary citizens helped designed the reserve “in such a way to protect both jobs and the environment”. “It was one of the greatest outpourings of public participation and support for a natural resource decision ever in Hawai‘i”, said Cha Smith, director of KAHEA, a grassroots organization based in Honululu that’s been at the forefront of advocating broad public involvement on the issue.

One of those who helped design the reserve, Isaac Harp, a native fishermen, said the group initially hoped to place management of the area under the Department of the Interior, which has a better conservation record than Commerce. But pressure from Hawai‘i’s powerful Democratic senator, Daniel Inouye, and others, put the reserve under the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce. Wespac has apparently had a history of direct and swift access to Senator Inouye’s office whenever a federal bureaucrat gives them trouble.

“Our initial effort was to get national monument status under the Department of Interior,” says Isaac Harp, a Native Hawaiian fisherman who served on the State’s Bottomfish Task Force. “But Inouye opposed a monument. So they came up with an agreement to make it a National Marine Sanctuary. In national monuments everything is prohibited unless specifically allowed. Under a sanctuary everything is allowed unless specifically prohibited.”

The Main Hawaiian Islands are among the most visited places on earth. They are one of the few places left where it is easy to snorkel, dive or swim to view the green sea turtles that migrated from their Northwestern Hawaiian Islands breeding grounds, an important component of Hawai‘i’s $800 million ocean recreation industry.

The distant and fragile Northwest Islands, identified by scientists as the last large-scale coral reef wilderness remaining on the planet, are home to unmatched biodiversity. Native Hawaiians call this vast 1,200 mile region a “pu‘uhonua” — a place of refuge and safety — for animals that can no longer be found in the Main Islands. Sacred sites abound in the islands.

Conservationists say Clinton’s mistake was to put the islands under the Department of Commerce’s National Ocean Service, which has allowed bottom trawlers to damage National Marine Sanctuaries elsewhere. The Department also houses Wespac.

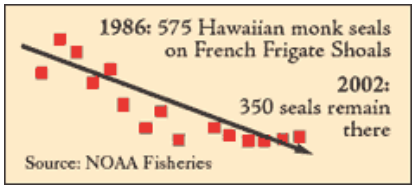
So far, the Department of Commerce has failed to enforce the Executive Orders, and bottom fishing has increased 17 percent, according to Wespac. One of Wespac’s new members, Sean Martin, was a lobster fisherman in the Northwest Islands for 16 years before it was ordered closed.

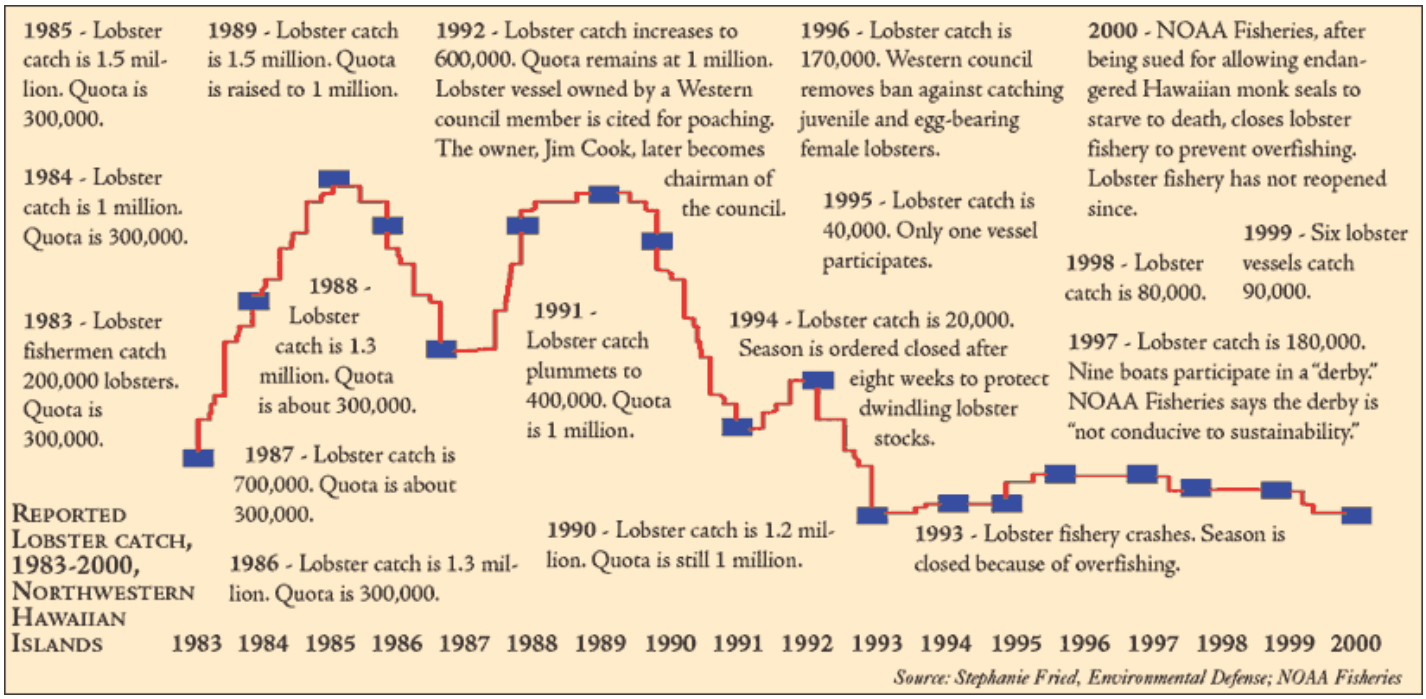
Martin said at a public hearing that the lobster fishery “is one of the most tightly controlled and managed fisheries in the country… It is unfortunate… the President has chosen to take regional management out of the region and have a resource managed by those who for the most part have never been there.”

But Louis “Buzzy” Agard, native Hawaiian fisherman, a lobster processor and an original member of the Wespac council, said the lobster fishermen have only themselves to blame for destroying the fishery. “If you are a council member and have an interest in lobster catches and boats, you shouldn’t be voting to continue when you have the scientists telling you it’s dangerous.”

They took millions of lobsters, and monk seal pups starved to death

In the 1980s the monk seal's largest colony at major rookeries began a long decline (chart at right). By 2000, two thirds of the seals at French Frigate Shoals were gone. Chart below shows the rise and fall of the lobster fishery, 1983-2000. Many scientists believe seal pups starved to death because a handful of fishers had killed too many lobsters. The total catch these years was more than 10,270,000 lobsters. The catch was nearly 4 million above the quota from 1983 to 1992, when it crashed.





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Cover Story

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PLUNDERING THE PACIFIC

Paul Koberstein

Editor of Cascadia Times

Marine animal casualties

Killed by longline fisheries in the Pacific: Four sea turtles and an albatross

Leatherback sea turtle

Endangered throughout its global range.Unlike many other sea turtles, the leatherback has a soft rubbery shell. The species feeds primarily on jellyfish and is capable of diving to depths greater than 3,000 feet. The Pacific population has been decimated by foreign and U.S. longline fleets.

Green sea turtle

Threatened except for the population breeding on the Pacific coast of Mexico, which is listed as endangered. Greens comprised 14 percent of the annual observed take of all species of turtles by the Hawaiian-based longline fishery in the 1990s.

Olive ridley sea turtle

Threatened throughout its global range, with the Mexican nesting population endangered. Threats are mortality from fishing and harvest of females and their eggs. Olive ridleys comprised 18% of the annual take of all species of sea turtles by the Hawaiian longliners.

Loggerhead sea turtle

Threatened. It has a reddish brown, bony carapace, with a comparatively large head. Adult loggerheads range in weight between 150 and 400 pounds. NOAA estimates that 5,000-50,000 loggerheads are killed each year by fishing activities.

Black-footed albatross

The population of black-footed albatross in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands dropped as longlining expanded in the 1990s. Each year hundreds of thousands of seabirds die globally from longliners and become unintended "bycatch". The birds dive for the baited hooks.

Marine Mammals entangled in Pacific Ocean Fisheries

Fishing operations disturb, harass, injure, or kill marine mammals, either accidentally or deliberately. The International Whaling Commission estimates that between 65,000 and 80,000 whales, dolphins, seals and other marine mammals die in global fisheries every year.

For any given species of marine mammal killed in a fishery, the number is often small, but often so are the species' populations. For example, in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands of Alaska, a groundfish trawl fishery kills or injures

an average of 7.8 endangered Steller sea lions each year.

A fishery for thresher shark and swordfish off California and Oregon annually kills or seriously injures 82 California sea lions and nearly 24 northern right-whale dolphins.

Since 1996, there have been at least 11 reports of humpback whales entangled in pot gear from the Alaska crustacean pot fishery. Of these entanglements, at least 2 likely killed the endangered whale.

Southeast Alaska/Gulf of Alaska/Bering Sea		
Bearded seal	Harbor seal	Pacific walrus
Beluga whale	Humpback whale	Ribbon seal
Gray whale	Killer whale	Ringed seal
Dall's porpoise	Northern elephant seal	Sea otter
Fin whale	Northern fur seal	Spotted seal
Harbor porpoise	Northern Pacific whitesided dolphin	Steller sea lion

Hawai'i		
Bottlenose dolphin	Rough-toothed dolphin	Spinner dolphin
False killer whales	Risso's dolphin	Sperm whale
Hawaiian monk seal	Short-finned pilot whale	

California/Oregon/Washington		
Baird's beaked whale	Killer whale	Pygmy sperm whale
Bottlenose dolphin	Long-beaked common dolphin	Risso's dolphin
California sea lion	Mesoplodont beaked whale	Sea otter
Common dolphin, shortbeaked	Minke whale	Short-beaked common dolphin
Common dolphin, longbeaked	Northern elephant seal	Short-finned pilot whale
Cuvier's beaked whale	Northern fur seal	Southern Pacific white-sided dolphin
Dall's porpoise	Northern Pacific white-sided dolphin	Sperm whale
Harbor porpoise	Northern right-whale dolphin	Steller sea lion
Harbor seal	Pacific white-sided dolphin	Striped dolphin
Humpback whale		

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Cover Story

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

PLUNDERING THE PACIFIC

Paul Koberstein

Editor of Cascadia Times

How to speak "fisheries"

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is based in Portland, but meets every few months in cookie-cutter hotels up and down the West Coast. Their meetings can last a whole week, though to the novice even one session can seem like an eternity.

They are open to the public, though few people not connected in some way to the fishing industry ever attend.

Perhaps this is because attending is rarely convenient. At a recent meeting of the North Pacific Council in Anchorage, an agenda item of interest to conservation groups was scheduled for Friday. Or Monday. Or Tuesday. So be prepared to stay the whole week.

The agenda, of course, requires much more than a third-graders' understanding, if not patience. Those who seek a chance to comment on a damaged coral ecosystem will not easily discern from the printed agenda when it might come up. If it ever does. Coral is essential to rockfish ecosystems, but rarely discussed at council meetings.

The biggest barrier, however, is language. At a council meeting, you are likely to hear something like, "The oy is less than the msy in the fmp for the dst, says the ssc."

What this means is that some fish are going to be caught. But you can be fluent in 18 languages and still not have a clue.

Public access to council meetings is a serious issue, says Mark Powell of the Ocean Conservancy. He's been attending them for years as a conservation advocate. He's found that council members will listen "semi-politely, and make snide comments and ignore you."

Citizens shouldn't let the jargon, the agendas and the pro-industry bias discourage them from attending and participating, Powell says.

If you want to influence a decision, or even file a lawsuit if you don't like a decision, you have to make comments on the record.

And it's ok to make them in plain old English.

Glossary

Bycatch: Fish and other living creatures which are accidentally caught, not sold or kept for personal use, and usually thrown overboard, dead or dying.

Essential Fish Habitat: Waters and sea floor necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity. Federal law requires fishery councils to develop plans to protect these areas.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): An area extending from the seaward boundaries of coastal states (3 nautical miles, in most cases) to 200 miles off the coast of the United States. Within this area, the United States claims and exercises sovereign rights and exclusive fishery management authority over all fish and all Continental Shelf fishery resources.

Fishery:
1. One or more stocks of fish which can be treated as a unit, and are identified on the basis of geographical, scientific, technical, recreational, and economic characteristics.
2. Any fishing for such stocks.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act: The 1976 law (amended in 1996) that governs U.S. fisheries. Congress is considering a bill to revise the law.

NOAA Fisheries: Formerly the National Marine Fisheries Service, this federal agency has two jobs: promoting fisheries, and protecting ocean species from the fisheries it promotes.

Maximum Sustainable Yield: The largest long-term average catch or yield that can be caught under prevailing ecological and environmental conditions. Conservationists say the concept leads to unsustainable fishing.

Optimum Yield: As defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the optimum yield is “the amount of fish which will provide the greatest overall benefit to the Nation,” taking into account the need for food, the local economy and the health of the stocks.

Overfishing: The rate or level of fishing mortality that jeopardizes the capacity of a fishery to produce the maximum sustainable yield on a continuing basis.

Overfished: A stock of fish that has been depleted to the point where fishing can no longer be sustained. In the Pacific region, stocks that dip below 25 percent of their historical abundance are considered overfished. The North Pacific council, however, has refused to define at what level a stock is overfished. For most stocks no one knows whether they’ve been overfished or not. The studies have not been done.

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Cover Story

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

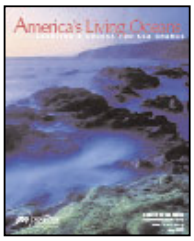
PLUNDERING THE PACIFIC

Paul Koberstein

Editor of Cascadia Times

Science Friction

Industry resists Pew Commission's call for change



Last June, the Pew Oceans Commission released a major report calling for reform of the way fisheries are governed. The prestigious Oceans Commission, made up of environmental, industry, and government representatives called for a new National Oceans Policy and regional ocean ecosystem councils staffed with non-partisan scientists. It would not eliminate federal fishery councils, but would strip them of any responsibility for balancing conservation and economics. Some conservationists would go further than the Oceans Commission and toss the entire fisheries council system overboard, and move NOAA Fisheries out of the Department of Commerce.

The report, "America's Living Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change," presented incontrovertible evidence that of 304 managed stocks that have been fully assessed, just under a third are either overfished, experiencing overfishing, or both.

The commission found that after fishers decimate a prized species, they move on to related, but perhaps less valuable, species. When these less valuable species then decline, fishermen move to yet another species and so on. This is a widespread problem occurring among rockfish on the Pacific coast, and contributing to severe declines in crustacean fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska.

The Oceans Commission was not the only source this year of troubling news about the oceans. Last May, the journal Nature revealed that just 10 percent of all large fish – including tuna, swordfish, marlin and the large groundfish such as cod, halibut, skates and flounder – remain alive in the sea. Most strikingly, the study showed that industrial fisheries take only ten to fifteen years to grind any new fish community they encounter to one tenth of what it was before.

The Ocean Commission's findings and recommendations have drawn loud criticism from the fishing industry, which claims it is already making changes. "Pew is attempting to manufacture a crisis to justify its call for a top-down federal bureaucracy and more opportunities for lawsuits," said Rod Moore, executive director of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association, a lobbying group based in Portland. "We have local people responding to problems right now; creating a new Washington, D.C.-based agency and relegating the public to an advisory role will undercut local and regional initiatives that are succeeding. Instead of more lawsuits, let's invest in more science so we can make the right decision."

The National Fisheries Institute, the nation's largest non-profit seafood trade association, said the current system of fisheries councils is, while not perfect, "working remarkably well." The group called the Ocean Commission's idea of a National Oceans Commission "an unnecessary financial and bureaucratic burden to the management of our oceans."

The Oceans Commission was the first comprehensive examination of US Ocean Policy in 30 years. It defined the problems facing the oceans, but also provided a road map for policymakers to restore America's oceans and fisheries. The report notes that rebuilding US fisheries has the potential to "restore and create tens of thousands of family wage jobs and add at least 1.3 billion dollars to the U.S. economy." It cites seven main areas to rebuild America's fisheries:

1. Redefine the Principal Objective of American Marine Fishery Policy to Protect, Maintain and Restore Marine Ecosystems.
2. Separate Conservation and Allocation Decisions.
3. Implement Ecosystem-Based Planning and Marine Zoning.
4. Regulate the Use of Fishing Gear that is Destructive to Marine Habitats.
5. Require Bycatch Monitoring and Management Plans as a Condition of Fishing.
6. Require Comprehensive Access and Allocation Planning as a Condition of Fishing.
7. Establish a Permanent Fishery Conservation and Management Trust Fund.

For a copy of the report, go to www.pewoceans.org.

Paul Koberstein is Editor of the Cascadia Times, where his article,
Plundering the Pacific, appeared in Fall 2003.

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In Focus

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

THE CILICIAN MONK SEAL COLONY IS GROWING

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The first seal colony size assessment study on the Cilician coast of Turkey, carried out by the Middle East Technical University, indicated a presence of 4 adult males, 6 adult females and 2 juveniles in 1996. This figure was very promising for an area that had previously been represented by a question mark on the Mediterranean monk seal distribution maps of scientific documents. In 2001, with 9 new pups and new identifications, that figure increased and the size of the colony reached 24 individuals. Although continuous breeding indicates the viability of the colony, the demographic evaluation of the colony made at the end of 2001 was a little worrying. The Age/Frequency chart (Fig. 1), illustrating the demographic structure of the colony in 2001, presented an abnormal pattern with a few missing year-classes (7 and 9). The figure also shows a very low annual birth rate (0.23) for the period in question.

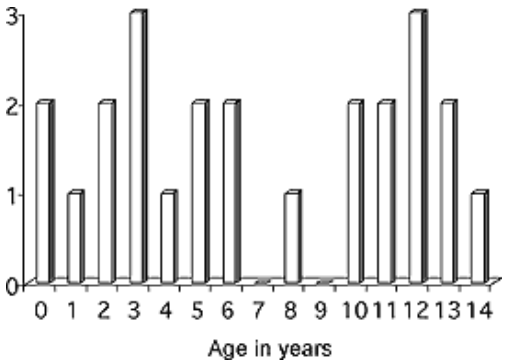

Figure 1. Estimated demographic structure of the Cilician monk seal colony (after Gucu et al. 2004).

Two major threats may be considered for reduced monk seal reproduction: pollution and lack of food. Pollutants, which may adversely affect reproductive success, such as heavy metals, PAH, and PCBs and insecticides, were not found in high concentration in the region. However, some new research results called attention to evidence of chronic lack of food in seals in the Aegean Sea. The increase in the industrial fishing power in the Cilician Basin and the subsequent reduction in the total catch of main target species is at an alarming level. The lack of food might therefore be linked to low reproduction rate and should be seriously considered as a threat to the survival of the colony.

Evaluation of the research results also indicated that the breeding sites of the Cilician monk seal colony have specific characteristics. Features common to all caves in which whelping was observed included: an entrance with a barrier against strong waves; a deep and wide beach located at the very far end; and a shallow protected pool in front. The cave floor texture also gradually changed seaward from coarse gravel to fine sand. These features seemed to be the distinguishing cave characteristics, which provided a safe and suitable whelping and nursing habitat. Whelping did not occur in all active caves, probably because they lacked a beach and/or a pool inside and protection against storms and strong waves. In active caves, seals only hauled-out and slept on the narrow and flat rock platforms. Furthermore, the presence of a protected pool inside all the breeding caves provided a safe area for

neonates to learn how to swim and to keep cool during warm weather conditions. The caves having these characteristics were very few and therefore it seemed that the number and size of suitable caves were limiting factors for reproduction success.

Figures 2 & 3. Seal caves with typical characteristics in the Cilician Basin.

The scarcity and importance of breeding caves and the dwindling state of the fish stocks are the main concerns in developing the conservation strategy designed and applied in the region. Two core zones, covering the near vicinity of the breeding caves, and a large fishery regulation zone in which only small-scale fishing operations by local artesanal fishermen are allowed, were designated along the Cilician coast in 1999. With this approach, young seals are protected against entanglement in fishing nets. Although some illegal trawling still occurs, the previously heavy fishing pressure on fish stocks has also been remarkably reduced. More importantly, the local small-scale fishermen, who are indebted to the seals for their exclusive coastal resource use rights, no longer see the seals as a pest to exterminate.

The conservation strategy applied aims solely in habitat protection. To what extent these measures will ultimately affect intrinsic population dynamism can hardly be foreseen and worrying questions like:

- What will happen when the new pups reach sexual maturity and the number of individuals ready to reproduce increases?
- Will inbreeding affect reproduction?
- Will the size of the few existing breeding caves be sufficient for multiple whelping, and will the breeding females peacefully share a cave?
- Will the slightly improving state of the ecosystem prove sufficient to meet the food requirements of the growing colony?

can best be answered by the colony itself.

Full of promise, the 2003 whelping season helped to diminish our concerns about the fate of the colony. First, one of the earliest pups found by the project team has reached maturity and has given birth to her first healthy pup in the cave where she was born. This is a significant event, signaling the efficient sharing of a breeding habitat among several reproducing individuals.

The second pup was found in a cave in which whelping had not previously been observed. The new cave meets the breeding cave criteria listed above, but was not frequently used until recently. We hope that, as the colony grows, recruits in search of new breeding sites will expand the range of the colony.

Further reading

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Perspectives

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

SEEKING ANSWERS IN THE GULF OF ISKENDERUN: DO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEALS MIGRATE

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Until recently, studies specifically targeting the Mediterranean monk seal in the Gulf of Iskenderun were very scarce, the species only being considered within the framework of general marine biology studies. Nevertheless, the issue was briefly included in the “Conservation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in Turkey: Cilician Basin (TR0019.03)” and the “Mersin-North Cyprus Project (TR0015.03)” – projects supported by WWF International, Europe/Middle East Program (Gucu et al. 1997, 1998, 1999). Furthermore, Middle East Technical University, Institute of Marine Sciences (METU-IMS), has carried out various marine biological surveys since the 1980s, some of which addressed monk seal distribution in the area.

The northern part of the Gulf of Iskenderun is characterized by low topography, sand dunes and very heavy industrial developments, with marine terminals and their respective coastal infrastructures. Therefore, the area has never been considered among the important monk seal habitats in Turkey. However, interviews with local fishermen during an Environmental Impact Assessment study conducted for Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline construction indicate that monk seals have been seen along the coast at Yumurtalik and particularly around Sugozu, where the marine terminal of the pipeline is located. Consequently, the Mediterranean monk seal is identified as one of the key priority themes of the Environmental Investment Program launched by BTC Co, which selected the METU-IMS to conduct research on the species.

The research project, which began on 1 August 2003 is, to a great extent, based on monk seal research and conservation experiences gained in the Cilician Basin (west coast of Mersin, 100 n.miles west of the Gulf). The goal of the project is to clarify if the species has a resident colony in and around the Gulf. The project also aims to conduct scientific research on the species to shed light on colony size, distribution, ecology and behavior. If the survey results indicate a viable seal colony in the area, the threats to survival of the colony will be determined and a baseline for future studies aiming at conservation of the species will be provided.

In October 2003, the first phase of the research was completed and the coastline between Karatas (Adana) and the Turkey-Syria Border was surveyed following the route depicted in Figure 1. The research mainly focused on the region between Çevlik and the Turkey/Syria border, where the topography is characterized by ruggedness and steep mountains plunging into the Mediterranean, with a cliff bound coastline and a rapid deepening in the offshore direction.

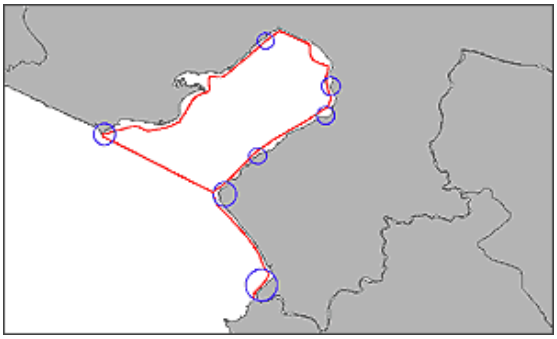

Figure 1. Survey tracks – Red line is the entire survey track; blue circles are the underwater survey tracks.

The field survey was mainly conducted to discover caves actively used by seals. The coastal stretch, corresponding to monk seal habitat descriptions (Gucu et al. 2004) were recorded. When such areas were found, an inflatable boat manned by the expert team and composed of one scientist skin diving, one scientist driving the boat and one scientist recording data, surveyed the entire area. In addition to the caves with open access from sea, the coast down to a depth of 30 meters was checked for other caves with underwater entrances. When a cave entrance was found, a team member dived, entered the cave and checked whether an air chamber existed inside. A ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) was kept ready to explore the caves located deeper than 15 meters and having an entrance longer than 10 meters. Discovered caves were divided into four categories: **Active** in which one or more seals were sighted or there was evidence of seal use (e.g. tracks, body depressions, feces), **Breeding** in which whelping occurs, **Abandoned** in which seals were historically observed, but are no longer in use, and **Potential** which meet the requirements and descriptions (1) of a monk seal cave (IUCN/UNEP 1988), but lack any sign of use. Overall, 29 potential caves were discovered; however no seal was sighted during the survey.

Interviews with local fishermen, in an attempt to create a local information network for quick and accurate access to seal sightings from the region, was also undertaken during the survey. The first results revealed a sharp decline in the number of seal sightings after the 1990s. Intensive use of explosives for fishing and the sharp decline in fish stocks were noted as the most probable factors reducing the number of seals. Surprisingly, none of the fishermen interviewed spoke about the harm inflicted by the seals upon their livelihood, a distinct contrast to areas where high seal density exists. Although no sign of hostility against the seal was observed among the local fishermen, deliberate killing should also be considered as a significant factor for the decline, because at least two individuals (one in Turkey [Basusta, pers. comm.] and another in Syria [Mo et al. 2003]) have been deliberately killed within the last 5 years.

Seal sightings reported by the fishermen present a similar pattern: an individual enters an area, is sighted by the majority of the fishermen and disappears shortly after. For instance, the fishermen near the Syrian border reported a seal appearing in spring 2003; it remained in the area for a week or so, and then vanished. The fishermen on the north of the Gulf reported a similar behaviour with a month’s delay, in summer 2003.

Research will continue until December 2004, and it may therefore be too early to speculate or draw conclusions on the basis of first research results. However, the difference in the dates of sightings in different locations may indicate that the area has never hosted a large, resident and isolated seal colony. The seals sporadically sighted in the area are members of a colony based elsewhere, and the home range of the Cilician monk seal is much greater than hitherto believed (Gucu et al. 2004).

The research results carried out on the coasts adjacent to the Gulf of Iskenderun, such as Syria (Mo et al. 2003), southern (Dendrinos & Demetropoulos 2003) and northeastern Cyprus (Gucu et al. 1995) represented very similar results (despite habitat suitability, very few and irregular sightings and no evidence of whelping), posing the question: “where do these sporadically sighted seals come from?"

The only exception to the low seal density areas in the eastern Mediterranean is the Cilician coast, where a resident, breeding colony exists [see The Cilician monk seal colony is growing, this issue].

The project is now testing the hypothesis that the core of the Mediterranean monk seal colony in the eastern Mediterranean is based along the Cilician coast and that a part of the colony, due to as yet unknown reasons, is induced to migrate along the triangle intuitively drawn in figure 2.

Figure 2. Hypothetical movements of the seal within the eastern Mediterranean.

During the next phase, the research will therefore focus on possible seal movements/migrations in the eastern Mediterranean. An Active and Passive infrared monitoring system, which was successfully used to monitor seals on the Cilician coast, will be installed in the newly discovered caves. The system will record seal movements inside a cave, registering date and time. Furthermore, a 35-mm camera with built-in flash will be attached to the recording system. The movement sensor will automatically activate the camera when an event occurs. The recorded data and the films will be retrieved every 3 months, analyzed for activity pattern, and for photo identification of the seal(s) sighted in the region. The outputs will then be compared with the photo-identified seals of the Cilician coast.

The team is now in search of additional funding to expand the research area and to include the northeast of Cyprus Island.

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1) A typical Mediterranean monk seal cave ideally has an underwater entrance and pebble or sandy beach above the reach of sea wave with provision of shelter.

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Monachus Science

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

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

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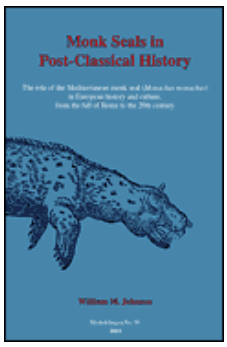
ABSTRACT



The role of the Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus* in the history, culture and economy of the Mediterranean region has long remained obscure and subject to error and contradiction. In order to extend historical knowledge of the species beyond the time-frame covered in our companion publication, *Monk Seals in Antiquity,* a review of the available literature was undertaken covering the period from the fall of Rome to the 20th century. This research indicates that the monk seal in the Mediterranean continued to be exploited for its fur, oil, meat and perceived medicinal properties well into the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, albeit on a much-reduced scale than the exploitation witnessed during the Roman era. The species also continued to be a target of Mediterranean fishers, angered over reduced catches and damaged nets. Elsewhere, large, newly-discovered colonies in the eastern Atlantic off the coast of Africa became a lucrative if short-lived industry for French, Portuguese and Spanish explorers. In the Mediterranean, sustained persecution of surviving groups, coupled with increasing human disturbance and deterioration of habitat, appears to have acted selectively against colony formation, leading to an inexorable decline and fragmentation of the population. Although described as 'rare' by science in 1779, the species continued to be a target for collectors from zoos and museums until the early 20th century, when extinctions along broad stretches of coastline first became apparent.

Publishing info

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.

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Monachus Science

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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.

This article was delivered as an oral presentation at the 2nd Symposium of Island Ecosystems, held in Funchal, Madeira, 5-9 October 2003.

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Letters to the Editor

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

Warped priorities

A few weeks after reading about monk seal projects being run on starvation rations, I heard on the news today of Keiko the orca whale's death, star of those Free Willy movies. A sad event, OK, but what is even sadder is the money thrown at that project to rescue a single individual whale, fly it to Iceland, teach it to eat live fish again and rejoin its family pod – which it never managed anyway. Twenty million dollars, according to CNN and running costs of $500,000 per month. Excuse me, perhaps our priorities are a little warped?

According to your site, Europe's most endangered marine mammal gets chickenfeed or nothing at all. I have a suggestion. Why not call the governments and those organisations to account? Publish a list every issue, detailing how much each is committing to monk seal conservation and for what. Then at least we will know the score. Call them "league tables".

– *J.J. Wilcox*

Close encounter

This morning, 27 October 2003 at 11:00 am, I swam at Honaunau bay on the Big Island of Hawaii. As I tried to get out of the water at two steps, I felt a large object on my back and suddenly a large head on my shoulder. This monk seal held on to me for nearly two minutes. I am told by the ranger that he is about 5 years old, and male. I didn't make any threatening movements and he did not hurt me. He has the softest smoothest belly I have ever felt, even smoother than my wife's! Also he has a #1 on his side and radio trans on his back.

Mahalo,

– *Cyrus Wagner*, Hawaii

Editor's reply:

As reported in previous issues of TMG, sightings and births of monk seals on the main, inhabited Hawaiian Islands continue to increase, posing something of a dilemma for scientists and conservationists [Monk seals colonise the Main Hawaiian Islands, TMG 6 (1): 2003].

A spate of recent human encounters with inquisitive or frolicsome seals led the US Department of Land and Natural Resources to issue a news release on 30 October 2003 [Do Not Feed or Interact with Hawaiian Monk Seals, 124KB], "reminding boaters, fishermen, swimmers and others, that it is against state and federal laws to feed or harass endangered Hawaiian monk seals. It is harmful to the animals and dangerous to people."

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

A 2 year old male seal designated RM-32, charged with nipping and groping swimmers on the Big Island and on Maui, was eventually banished, and flown 800 miles away on a Coast Guard C-130 Hercules transport to the former nuclear test site of Johnston Atoll [see Hawaiian Press Watch, this issue].

Further information

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Reintroduction hopes

I'm in Almeria, Southern Spain… actually in a little place called Mojacar. I'm doing some work with the local marine animal rescue group who are also part of Ecologists in Action. They are interested in the monk seal and I was wondering if there are any plans for reintroduction into this part of the Med?

– *Doug Cartlidge*, Almeria, Spain

Editor's reply:

There are several important points to remember when considering the possible reintroduction of *Monachus monachus* into such historically occupied sites. One: the monk seal is extinct in Spain. Two: Artificial or forced reintroduction, although still a dream of the mechanistically-minded, has yet to achieve a consensus of scientific opinion, and for a variety of reasons:

- Lack of candidate animals (only 350-500 individuals survive in the whole of the Mediterranean).
- Degradation of historically-occupied habitat (e.g. by coastal development and tourism).
- Depleted fish stocks due to overfishing may also impact survival.
- Unless the reintroduction site is fenced-off, there is no guarantee that the animals will remain.
- Within such an enclosure, however, the animals would no longer be wild, but semi-captive and probably dependent upon feeding.
- In most areas where monk seals have been eradicated by fishermen, there is no indication that hostile attitudes have changed for the better.

Three: For all the above reasons, only steps that encourage the natural recolonisation of the species have so far been approved by the monk seal conservation community. Indeed, the UN Action Plan for the Management of the Mediterranean Monk Seal [18KB] and related UNEP/MAP conference resolutions call upon countries to protect historically-occupied habitat in the hope that this will encourage stragglers or migrant individuals to become permanent residents.

While the idea of translocation continues to cause controversy [see Mystery at RAC/SPA, this issue and Monk Seal reintroduction in Israel, TMG 5 (2): 2002], consensus opinion is not entirely elusive.

Published in 1998, the Mediterranean Monk Seal – Conservation Guidelines [955KB] synthesizes scientific thinking on a range of management issues, including translocation and captive breeding. It was subsequently endorsed by 78 marine mammalogists and other professionals involved in the study and conservation of the monk seal. The multilingual edition – in English, French, Greek, Spanish and Turkish – is available in the Monachus Library.

Scuba diving and monk seals

Is there any research done on the monk seal that involves scuba diving?

– *Rob Fraser-Thompson*, United Kingdom

Editor's reply:

Scuba diving does not play a significant role in Mediterranean monk seal research. There are, however, exceptions to the rule – for example, when diving is required for mapping caves with

underwater entrances. Turkey's leading monk seal research and conservation organisation, the Mediterranean Seal Research Group (AFAG) was actually founded by scuba diving members of the Underwater Research Society (SAD), and they continue to apply their diving skills when required.

One of the most important reasons that scuba diving only figures infrequently during research is that the Mediterranean monk seal is highly susceptible to disturbance. As such, scientific investigations are normally geared towards non-invasive methods.

Recognising the risk of human disturbance to the species, Turkish law expressly prohibits entry into seal caves.

Caribbean monk seals – the search continues

I see from your excellent web site/journal that you have referenced my paper with Professor I.L Boyd in Oryx, however you have recorded my name incorrectly – I am M.P. *Stanfield*.

Incidentally, we are continuing our investigations into the possible existence of the Caribbean Monk Seal in view of our findings in N.E. Jamaica and N. Haiti. A further field trip is in the planning stages for 2005. In 1999, after the publication of the 'Circumstantial evidence for the existence of Monk Seals in the West Indies', we visited E. Cuba with Cuban scientists going to areas which have hitherto been 'off limits' and could find no evidence of the seal's existence in this area.

– *Mike Stanfield*, United Kingdom.

✓ **Editor's note:**

The typo, which recorded Dr. Stanfield's name as "Standford" in the Monachus Profiles section has been corrected.

For further information on the search for the extinct(?) Caribbean monk seal, *Monachus tropicalis*, readers are advised to check out the following publications:

Boyd I.L. and M.P. Stanfield. 1998. Circumstantial evidence for the presence of monk seals in the West Indes. Oryx 32 (4): 310-316.

Lavigne D. 1998. Caribbean Monk Seals – *Are* they Extinct? The Monachus Guardian 1 (2): December 1998.

Seal sighting in Kas

Last week [11th-17th May 2003] we saw a seal in the port of Kas [on the Anatolian coast of Turkey, adjacent to the Greek island of Kastellorizo], at about 23.00. We were told that one sees a seal there from time to time, but never before inside the port. The animal did not appear to be very shy.

What is your information about monk seals in this area?

– *Ingo Palm*, Germany

✓ **Harun Güçlüsoy, SAD-AFAG, Foça, Turkey, replies:**

We will be delighted to add your observation to our database where we store our monk seal sightings records. Concerning seals around Kas, we searched the records in our dbase file, and so far we have 16 monk seal sightings, of which 8 are our own records from 1994 to 2002. We also have two records from the harbour of Kas in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

A juvenile seal photographed in the Kas area in October 1997.

A juvenile seal observed and photographed by one of our volunteers reveals that breeding still occurs around this region. Threats to the species in this region are mainly tourism related, including cave diving, disturbance and coastal development.

Santorini Seals?

I heard of a population of monk seals in Santorini (Thira) [a popular tourist island in the southern Cyclades, Aegean sea]. Is it true and if so, do you have any more information on this issue?

– *Dr. Onno Gross*, Hamburg, www.deepwave.org.

Stella Adamantopoulou, MOm, Athens, Greece, replies:

Unfortunately there is limited information on seal sightings in Santorini (less than 10 reports). However, the species still exists around the coastline of the island. The most recent observation was in February 2001.

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

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Recent Publications

Vol. 6 (2): December 2003

In Print

- **Adam P.J. and G.G. Garcia**. 2003. New information on the natural history, distribution, and skull size of the extinct (?) West Indian monk seal, *Monachus tropicalis*. Marine Mammal Science 19 (2): 297–317. [Abstract]
- **Antonelis G.A., J.D. Baker and J.J. Polovina**. 2003. Improved body condition of weaned Hawaiian monk seal pups associated with El Niño events: potential benefits to an endangered species. Marine Mammal Science 19 (3): 590–598. [Abstract]
- **Boland R.C. and M.J. Donohue**. 2003. Marine debris accumulation in the nearshore marine habitat of the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, *Monachus schauinslandi* 1999-2001. Marine Pollution Bulletin 46 (11): 1385-1394. [Abstract]
- **Güçlüsoy H. and Y. Savas**. 2003a. Status of the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) in the Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area, Turkey. Zoology in the Middle East: 28: 5-16. [Abstract 77KB]
- **Güçlüsoy H. and Y. Savas**. 2003b. Interaction between monk seals *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) and marine fish farms in the Turkish Aegean and the management of the problem. Aquaculture Research 34: 777-783. [Abstract 85KB]
- **Karamanlidis A.A., R. Pires, H.C. Neves and C. Santos**. 2003. Habitat of the endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) at São Lourenço – Madeira. Aquatic Mammals: 29 (3): 400-403. [Abstract 86KB]
- **Pastor T. and A. Aguilar**. 2003. Reproductive cycle of the female Mediterranean monk seal in the western Sahara. Marine Mammal Science 19 (2): 318–330. [Abstract]

Web publications, presentations & reports

- **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.

In press

- **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]
- **Gucu A.C., G. Gucu and H. Örek**. 2004. Habitat use and preliminary demographic evaluation of the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) in the Cilician Basin (Eastern Mediterranean). Biological Conservation 16 (3): 417-431. [Abstract]

- **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:

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