Hi, my name is Adriana and I am a monk seal, of the seal species. I wrote this book with the help of my friends, so that you could get to know us better. We have been living in the sea for thousands of years. Have you ever seen the sea? It is immense. We share the sea with many small and large fish, tortoises, crabs, plankton and algae. Seals are mammals like dogs. We are shy and rarely come near humans.
Look at me carefully. The shape of my body is adapted for swimming, similar to a fish. We have long bristles on our noses and above our eyes for feeling things. Children like us because of our big, round eyes. Our limbs have become fins, which enable us to swim quickly and gracefully. On the land we lie on our bellies, and move by pushing with our fins. But we prefer to stay in the sea. Our coat is grey or brown, glossy and soft as silk.

Our young have white fur on their bellies.

The monk seal mother is nursing her young. She can have her first offspring at the age of five.

We feed on fish.

My little one is tired. The swimming and playing with friends was particularly exhausting today.
We are also called the sea monk, sea bear, sea man. Our Latin name is *Monachus monachus*. An adult weighs approximately 350 kg. This is the equivalent of the weight of ten children. Sometimes we live to be 40 years old. Our teacher the seal will tell you about the origin of our species.

The shape of the skull indicates that seals are related to dogs and cats. You can see the canine teeth for catching prey.

An adult monk seal can reach 3.5 m in length. Seals also live in other seas e.g. Hawaii. Our relatives are also endangered because of environmental pollution.
Monk seals used to live on the Mediterranean coast, the Atlantic coast, the coast of Africa and Senegal.

Sea-shores with sewage drains, settlements and beaches for humans are unsuitable for us. We have secluded ourselves in a few remaining quiet places in the Mediterranean and the Western Atlantic.

Today only some 500 individuals live on the coast of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.
Luckily we have friends among humans, too. They have provided special protected areas for us.

The monk seal always played an important role in history and legends. Homer talks about the monk seal in his *Ulysses*: a man was clad in the monk seal fur to come closer to the god Proteus who slept among a herd of monk seals. He wanted to know his secrets.

In the ancient mythology it was believed that the gods protect the monk seal. She is the symbol of love for the sun and the sea.

Marine parks were opened along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coast, in Greece and Foça in Turkey. The protected area in Greece is located in North Sporade, where many of my relatives and friends live. We need more living space, and expect help from our human friends.

It was believed that the monk seal’s fur has magical properties, making childbirth easier to women lying on its fur.

According to the legend fishermen carried the monk seal’s bristles in a pouch around the neck for protection of drowning in case of a shipwreck.
The monk seal feeds on fish, octopus and crabs.

Monk seals can dive 20 m deep and stay up to 15 minutes undersea. Their heart beat frequency decreases during diving from 120 to 4 beats per minute. We can endure great pressure during diving to great depths.

Our nostrils can be closed firmly to prevent the sea water getting in our noses.

Little holes on the sides of our head are ears. Although we have no earlobes our hearing is perfect.

Our excellent eyesight enables us to see both above and under sea.
We are very lively and playful. At night, by the light of the moon and the stars we find each other easily using our good sight and hearing.

The male and the female play. They do not spend their lives together.

After 11 months of pregnancy a young seal is born, usually in the summer or autumn. The young are 1 m long and weigh 15-25 kg at birth. They can swim after a few days.

The female nurses the pup for several weeks, till they learn to catch their own food. The female does not have young every year.
We need isolated caves with sand or shingle beaches for rest and giving birth. In the past we could use less secluded beaches, but we were driven away by tourists and other people.

Sometimes we use caves with flooded entrances. These are the safest, and we are protected from curious tourists.

Many geographic terms along the coast and islands are associated with the monk seal.
The fishermen are angry when we tear their nets during our play.

Sometimes we get entangled in the nets and drown.

Some have no understanding and hunt us with harpoons. In some countries the monk seal is a protected species. Nevertheless we are hunted by poachers. Some fishermen also catch more fish than they are allowed.
We are not only worried because we are hunted, but also because of spreading human settlements. We are worried that no food will be left for us because of the fishermen, and we will starve to death.

The increasing pollution of the sea puts our health at risk. Toxins from liquid waste flow to the sea and are taken up by plankton. The fish feed on plankton, and we feed on fish. This is how the toxins produced by humans enter our bodies.

We hope that our human friends will contribute towards the Mediterranean, Ionian and Adriatic seas to become clean again. What would the sea look like without plankton, fish, crabs, dolphins, whales and us seals?
It is a great thing that you and your friends are helping the monk seals and other creatures. Nowadays we are protected by law in many Mediterranean countries. Many organisations for the protection of wildlife and nature are working on improvement of our living conditions.
We are happy here. The mother monk seal and her family should not be disturbed. In the Adriatic and Ionian sea refuge areas have been established. We are grateful if you respect and appreciate all living creatures.

Your Adriana
and her big family