

Guest Editorial: Add biopolitics to the monk seal's deadly foes

by Manel Gazo

International News

Including – Monk Seal voted 'Europe's Cutest Critter' but opinion poll reveals squandered opportunities as well as hope.

Hawaiian News

Including – KAHEA launches online petition to save the Hawaiian monk seal.

Mediterranean News

Including – Well-wishers bid farewell to Dimitris, Greece's famous orphaned seal...

– Turkish government pledges 5 new protected areas for the Monk Seal, by Cem Orkun Kiraç.

Cover Story: Arab the Pilgrim

New insights into monk seal migratory behaviour on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, by Ali Cemal Gucu and Meltem Ok.

In Focus: One pup – three "mothers"

The role of mothers and "aunties" in rearing a monk seal pup, by Rosa Pires

Perspectives: Sensitive Sea Areas and the Mediterranean monk seal

by Costas Marcus Triantafillou

Letters to the Editor

Including – Pup catching plans draw fire, by Harun Güçlüsoy.

Recent Publications

Publishing Info



International News: Voted Europe's Cutest Endangered Species, but will protection ever follow?



Mediterranean News: Dimitris the orphaned monk seal receives a big send off on Alonissos.



Cover Story: "Arab", and others like him, may provide important clues to seal movements along Turkey's Mediterranean coast.



Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Guest Editorial

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ADD BIOPOLITICS TO THE MONK SEAL'S DEADLY FOES

Manel Gazo

Going through the guest editorials of other TMG issues, I see there's always a reference to the writer's first sighting of a monk seal. I'm also in the list of those lucky people that, in their time on Earth, will share some of it with these special creatures. From 1995 to 2001, I spent several months every year studying the Mediterranean monk seal colony of Cabo Blanco (western Sahara – Mauritania). My first sighting was from the cliffs of the Saharan coast, where several individuals "floated" in the entrance of Cave-1 (the main cave where the colony rests and rears its pups). Of all the times I spent with the colony during those years, there are two moments saved in the files of my memory that, with some regularity, I like to remember: one was the first time I entered a cave with more than 90 individuals hauled out on the sandy beach inside, males, females, juveniles, adults and pups resting all together; sounds, movements and odours reminded me of a prehistoric picture. The second memory that stands out is the mother-pup dialogue, the sound of the sharp bark of the mother returning to the cave answered by the desperate yelp of the pup anxious for suckling time.



During the years, I've had the chance to visit different places and people conducting research and conservation programmes with monk seals. I still remember the time I spent at French Frigate Shoals with colleagues from the National Marine Fisheries Service, working with the Hawaiian monk seal. For the very first time in my life I understood why, in many old books and guides, several authors described monk seals as *inoffensive and trusting animals*. It is easy to imagine how the seal's docility, from which scientists take profit nowadays to conduct their research, was also used in the sealing expeditions of the 19th century to slaughter the animals for their oil and pelts. "*The seals were easy to kill*" — this overwhelming sentence contained in a 19th century book, still reflects the situation of the monk seals nowadays. Although not commercially exploited, the indirect threats that monk seals face today are at least as efficient as the mass slaughter of olden times.

Somewhere I read that the number of workshops and meetings organized to confront the drastic decline of the species is greater than the real numbers of individual seals alive. Unfortunately for the seals, in the Mediterranean, biopolitics has to be listed as another cause of decline affecting the species — alongside direct killing, loss of habitat, overfishing and incidental catches. Too many countries sharing the same sea, too many competing interests in coastal zones and too many economic and social differences to allow a conservation politics of consensus. And all the while, existing among them all, is a handful of seals fighting a last chance claim for survival.

Of course, the same problem exists not only between countries but also within them: how many research groups, organizations and teams are working for the same objective but without sharing results or experiences; or how many conservation efforts and research projects have been abandoned because of a conflict of interest between groups and individuals.

Just this week, here in Barcelona, an international event has been inaugurated (*Forum Barcelona 2004*). The ultimate goal of this event is to promote *dialogue* between countries, cultures and societies in order to go a step further towards cultural diversity, sustainable development and conditions for peace. Who knows, perhaps the first step solution to the monk seal problem is just to sit and engage in dialogue with the right interlocutor.

While some countries are still thinking in terms of planning complex and expensive strategies to repopulate their degraded coasts with the seals that disappeared many decades ago, I'm still wondering why this great amount of money, time and effort is not devoted to conservation actions in the places (and countries) where the species still occurs. A year ago I was involved in a survey to monitor the north coast of Syria in order to identify potential habitat for the species in case some individuals still remain in the area. If seals do survive there, then certainly it will be along coasts like those. But materials and infrastructure to conduct a survey of the comprehensive type required in the region is limited. In Spain by contrast, the idea of reintroducing seals is still alive, and there are at least four potential translocation sites. If anyone wants to do something for seals and has the money and the time, why not invest it in people and places where the potential salvation of seals is still possible? ...biopolitics again.

With realities being what they are, the future of the Mediterranean monk seal is more than uncertain. In the same way that, during last centuries, the decline of the species has been linked to human activities, so too is the ability to reverse that trend also in human hands.

The roots of that hypothetical change, however, do not belong to biologists, wildlife managers, vets or ecologists — rather, the plan for change and what is expected of it has to be re-written in order to involve all those whose lives somehow intersect with the seals'. As a consequence, from them will emerge the final decision of whether it is worth the time and money to keep the seals alive.

Because the real question is not *Do you want to save the seals?* — an easy question that most people would answer in the affirmative. The real question is: *Do you want to continue living with seals in the Mediterranean?* If the answer is 'yes' then there can be no alternative but to implement the relevant social, economic and biopolitical changes that, among others, will inevitably affect the use of the coastal zone and will regulate fishing and tourist activities. Conservation is not free. If we don't walk in this direction, however, unable to turn back from the exploitative road that we have long travelled with the monk seal, then there can be little doubt that, in short order, *Monachus monachus* will enlarge the list of the world's extinct species.

Manel Gazo, Barcelona, May 2004

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



International News

Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

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Seal Appeal

Support monk seal conservation. Help us stay on line. The Monachus Guardian is the only dedicated source of news and information on the world's endangered monk seals. Its publication fulfils explicit recommendations of conservation action plans for the species.

The Monachus Guardian is now accepting donations and voluntary subscriptions from its readers via Kagi, the leading Internet service that ensures swift, secure online payments by credit card. Kagi accepts American Express, Cart Blanche, Diner's Club, Discover, EuroCard, JCB, Optima, Nova, MasterCard and Visa credit and debit cards.

If you want to help us help the world's endangered monk seals, please consider...

- **Supporting The Monachus Guardian**, the world's only Internet journal dedicated to monk seals, their shrinking habitat, and the forces threatening their survival. With a voluntary subscription or a simple donation, you are helping us and our partner organisations in the field bring monk seals and their conservation to a growing international audience – decision makers, scientists, schools and universities, journalists and many others.
- **Supporting the rehabilitation and release of orphaned monk seal pup, 'Dimitris'**. With less than 500 individuals still remaining in the wild, every successful rehabilitation represents a tangible benefit to the survival of the species. Donations are still urgently required by our partner organisation, the Hellenic Society for the Study & Protection of the Monk Seal ([MOM](#)), to cover the mounting costs of Dimitris' rehabilitation, and post-release care.



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Europe's Cutest Critter

...but opinion poll reveals squandered opportunities as well as hope

The Mediterranean monk seal was voted Europe's "cutest" endangered species in an international survey conducted in April 2004.

Respondents from around the world participated in the web-based poll, conducted by [WWF United States](#). The monk seal achieved 47% of the vote, with the Eurasian lynx following closely at 43% and the Sea Horse trailing at 9%.

"In a race that went down to the wire," reports WWF, "the monk seal overtook the Eurasian lynx in the final days to win the title of Europe's cutest animal. The feline family threatened to send a second member to the finals, but seal lovers worldwide put an end to that dream."

Despite the rather odd spectacle of endangered and persecuted species competing with each other for human affection, the survey *did* demonstrate one thing in no uncertain terms: the Mediterranean monk seal's broad potential in terms of public appeal.



More than fund-raising promise, however, is the species' ability to capture the public imagination, and to symbolise the devastating threats that confront both seal and the Mediterranean ecosystem as a whole: mass tourism, industrial overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution.

Anyone who has been following monk seal conservation over the last 25 years or so will have long lost count of the conference resolutions, scientific recommendations, project proposals, telexes, faxes, emails and letters that have tried to convey the persuasiveness of that idea to governments, institutions and organisations.

A failure by the conservation movement to capitalise on the monk seal's potential may be one reason why vital projects for the species remain chronically starved of funds – including the guarding of marine protected areas, and even rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned pups.

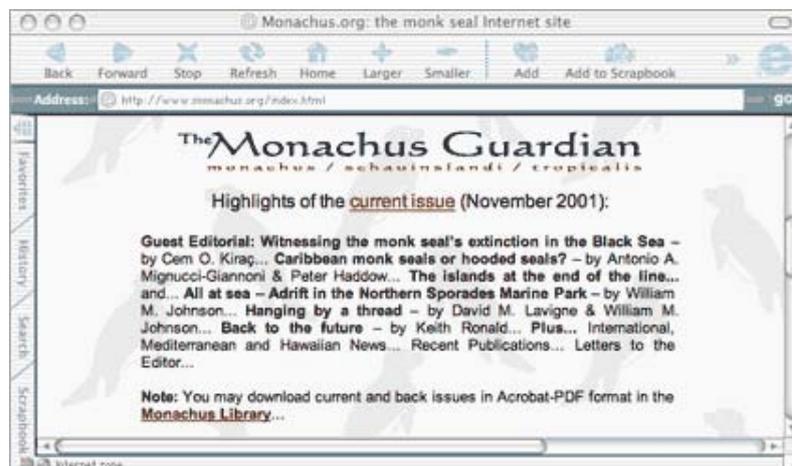
For one reason or another, international conservation organisations have never mounted a concerted, international campaign on behalf of Europe's most endangered marine mammal. Some have even withdrawn from the conservation of the species of late, apparently seeing better prospects or more important priorities, elsewhere.

But as the "world's cutest" poll has demonstrated loud and clear, that reluctance to champion the cause of the monk seal is flawed on every possible level: financial, educational, ecological.

Whether conservation multinationals will ever wake up to their squandered opportunity remains to be seen. – W.M.J.

Sorry state

We apologise to readers who have been led astray by the apparently defunct web site – and former home of The Monachus Guardian – www.monachus.org. We have been reliably informed that work is at last underway by IFAW/IMMA to set up valid links to TMG, thereby finally disabusing visitors of the idea that the "current issue" of the journal is "November 2001".



We also apologise to those visitors to have tried to contact us through the old editor, webmaster and librarian email addresses @monachus.org. These have not been accessible to us for a considerable period of time; for some indeterminate period during 2002-2003, such emails may not have generated non-delivery error messages.

NetWatch

Monk seal

Monachus monachus

Lives: Mediterranean Sea region

Diet: Fish

Threats: Collisions with boats, bycatch, water pollution

– From World Wildlife Fund, [WWF United States](#)

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Hawaiian News

Download this page 

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Update

KAHEA launches online petition to save the Hawaiian monk seal



© Rico Leffanta
Na Ilioholoikauaua (the Hawaiian monk seal)

We have a rare opportunity to save one of the last wild places on earth and to save the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction, writes Cha Smith of KAHEA.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are comprised of atolls, sandbars and outcroppings and stretch for 1200 miles off Kaua'i. They are a nearly intact pristine and biologically diverse coral reef ecosystem and provide important habitat to thousands of species. These ancient and remote islands represent one of the last intact marine ecosystems on the planet. With over 3.5 million acres of coral reef, they are truly a world treasure.

Two public processes will determine the long-term protection measures for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. NOAA initiated a Sanctuary designation process for the NWHI Reserve and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources has proposed draft regulations that would establish a state refuge for the biologically rich state waters.

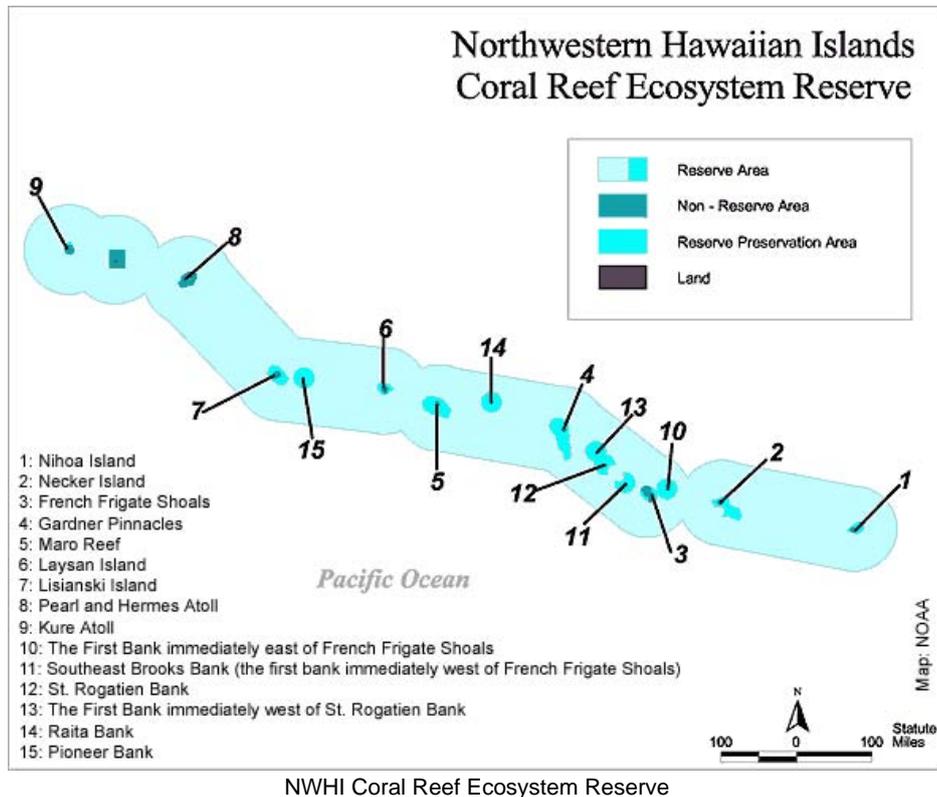
The Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) will be releasing draft regulations for state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands very soon. The agency is planning public hearings on the revised regulations for state waters in the NWHI the last two weeks of July 2004.

State waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands represent the heart of the coral reef ecosystem and contain the vast majority of biodiversity. The 84-million acre Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve boundaries surround, but do not include these waters.

It is commendable that DLNR is proposing refuge status for these important waters. However, the proposed regulations contain serious flaws that must be addressed. Strong regulations are necessary to protect vulnerable reefs and to provide habitat protection for the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal, threatened and endangered sea turtles and millions of seabirds. We encourage public support for the State's Refuge plan – with important conservation changes.

KAHEA will be posting the draft Refuge plan, comment deadlines and Talking Points highlighting needed changes. Please visit our website www.kahea.org for more information.

In April, 2004, the Sanctuary process called for public comment on its Draft Reserve Operations Plan. This plan is intended to guide management of the Reserve and serve as the foundation for the proposed Sanctuary. The NWHI Reserve Advisory Council developed and submitted to NOS a strong conservation-based Operations Plan. However, NOS returned for comment the proposed plan that had been weakened in important ways.



In response to a call to action by KAHEA, Environmental Defense, and The Ocean Conservancy, NOAA received 25,000 comments calling for the strongest possible protections for the NWHI. Public comment called for regulations and enforcement, an ecosystem-based management plan, protection of cultural rights and recognition of the unique and fragile nature of this phenomenal archipelago.

An Indigenous Advisory Group on subsistence fishing, including many kupuna (elder Hawaiians) who fish commercially, was convened by the Sanctuary program to develop Fishing Alternatives in the NWHI. The advisory group stated that protection of the NWHI is a part of Native Hawaiian cultural identity and *kuleana* (responsibility). They advised that no commercial extraction should be allowed in this Pu'uhonua (Refuge) and supported continued cultural access.

In addition, independent scientists hired by NOAA to review the existing scientific and economic data concluded that the NWHI are a fragile but relatively intact component of the entire Hawaiian Islands ecosystem, which is substantially degraded in the Main Hawaiian Islands. The consultants recommend an ecosystem based conservation approach that is consistent with existing Reserve protections, the USFW (US Fish and Wildlife Service) Refuges and the proposed Sanctuary. This approach will ensure ecosystem integrity as required by law. They reject the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's fishery management plan, designed to extract maximum biomass without insuring protection of the NWHI ecosystem.

This report concluded that due to poor economic performance, the lack of sustainability of the small commercial fishery and the fragile nature of the ecosystem, no commercial extraction is appropriate in the proposed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Sanctuary. A summary of the SRG Report and the full report can be found at www.kahea.org.

Na Ilioholoikauaua (the Hawaiian monk seal) needs our help

KAHEA is circulating a petition directed to federal agencies that encourages immediate action on behalf of the gravely imperiled monk seal. **The petition effort links the fate of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands with that of the Hawaiian monk seal.**

PLEASE SIGN OUR ON-LINE PETITION TODAY:

<http://www.kahea.org/petition.php>

Read More about Ilioholoikauaua and the on-going public process to protect their home, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands at www.kahea.org.

Marine Mammal Commission report released

The Marine Mammal Commission's Annual Report to Congress for 2003 has recently been published. While our own publishing deadline has precluded us from including a review of the report's findings in this issue of TMG we are, following customary procedure, making the Hawaiian monk seal chapter available for download in the Monachus Library.

Marine Mammal Commission. 2004. Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*). Pages 79-95 in Chapter III, Species of Special Concern, Annual Report to Congress, 2003. Marine Mammal Commission, Bethesda, Maryland. [[Monachus Library](#)  96KB]

Hawaiian Press Watch

Kaua'i monk seals 'wired' for tracking March 9, 2004

That manmade thing glued to the back of that endangered Hawaiian monk seal doesn't appear to bother him... Researchers know he's a him because they netted and sedated the critter, glued the satellite-tracking device to his fur, took blood and tissue samples for his annual physical examination, then returned him to the wild (The Garden Island).

Jean-Michel Cousteau's Voyage to Kure March 6, 2004

The devastation we witnessed from pollution was not limited to plastics. Hundreds of tons of fishing nets clog the reefs along the NWHI, tearing away precious coral and entangling all sorts of marine life, including sea turtles, Monk seals and seabirds. Valiant efforts by NOAA to retrieve these mountains of abandoned nets can't keep up with their sheer numbers. Our divers assisted in hauling up some of the nets we found in deeper waters, and I can assure you it's a tedious and difficult task to disentangle these monstrous webs caught on the fragile coral reefs... Along this ribbon of life, we found teeming populations of spinner dolphins and large apex predators such as reef sharks, jacks, and amberjacks. We encountered many of the Hawaiian endemic species of reef fish, including the rare masked angelfish and Hawaiian grouper; all perfect reminders of an intact coral reef ecosystem... While their population has dwindled to less than 1,500, the seldom-seen monk seals were our companions at many of our dive sites, frolicking around our vessel, sunning themselves on the beaches and were inquisitive around our divers (From Jean-Michel Cousteau's Log – Voyage to Kure, August 2003).

Monk seal on Maui seen begging for food Feb 27, 2004

Maui — A Hawaiian monk seal reportedly has been begging for food in Ma'alaea Harbor in recent days, and wildlife officials yesterday issued a reminder that feeding or harassing such animals is against state and federal law (Honolulu Advertiser).

Public reminded to avoid contact with monk seals Feb 27, 2004

Maui – Joe Fell-McDonald was working at the stern of a federal humpback whale sanctuary vessel

at Maalaea Harbor when he looked back and saw an adult monk seal staring at him... “He seemed to be saying, ‘Where’s my food?’” Fell-McDonald said. “After a brief staring contest, the seal swam to the next boat, then on to the next and so on, always acting as if he was looking for food or something” (Honolulu Star-Bulletin).

Isle monk seals film their own TV special **Feb 19, 2004**

Fitted with underwater cameras, Hawaiian monk seals are teaching Hawaii researchers more about their lives than ever before... From a seal’s-eye view, the animals are showing what and how they eat, and how they play and fight with each other in their underwater world... Scenes in the 30-minute special were compiled during eight years in the French Frigate Shoals, using 40 different seals who carried the small, back-mounted cameras for several days each (Honolulu Star-Bulletin).

Threatened Seals Forage Far From Home, Cameras Show **Feb 19, 2004**

The Crittercam study immediately offered new insights into the foraging behavior of the highly endangered monk seals. Researchers had long focused on the lush coral reefs—with plenty of fish around them—as the natural feeding ground for the seals. But Crittercam footage showed the seals do not stay on the reef; Instead they venture far off shore for food... “They go out onto these deep slopes, which appear barren with pretty much just sand and loose rock, and that’s where they make their living,” [Frank] Parrish said. “This [knowledge] has changed our mind-set. Now that we know the seals are feeding outside the atolls, we have to take that habitat into consideration in the protection of the seal” (National Geographic News).

Cameras to be mounted on young monk seals **Feb 18, 2004**

The science of tracking endangered Hawaiian monk seals has gone up a notch... Through “Crittercam” technology, small cameras will be mounted on the backs of juvenile seals, whose survivability in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands has suffered, possibly due to limited food, scientists said (The Garden Island).



Hawaiian monk seal equipped with Crittercam.

Human contact may be threat to monk seals **Jan 31, 2004**

A Hawaiian monk seal appeared in Lahaina this week, exhibiting the same begging behavior — approaching people with its mouth wide open — as the demeanor of a seal on Kaua’i that was later found dead.

Death of seal on Kaua’i coast puzzles marine scientists **Jan 29, 2004**

Marine mammal experts are mystified by the death of an apparently healthy Hawaiian monk seal, found last Thursday evening at the water’s edge at Kapa’a... A necropsy on the 425-pound adult male seal showed no sign of injury or illness... Veterinarian Bob Braun was assisted in the investigation by NOAA Fisheries marine mammal biologist Brad Ryon, who said the animal had no recent injuries and did not appear to be starving, although there was no food in its belly (Honolulu Advertiser).

Research Ethics

The 1st Biennial Workshop on Ethics in Marine Mammal Research was held in Greensboro, North Carolina, on December 14, 2003 during the 2003 meeting of the Society for Marine Mammalogy. The workshop was introduced by the organizers, Charles Littnan and Tim Ragen who presented results from an ethics survey conducted at the 2001 Society for Marine Mammalogy meeting.

Other speakers and topics included: Marc Bekoff, “Minding animals: ethics and human intrusions”; Steve Leathery, “The ethics of research and enhancement permits”; Peter Corkeron, “Ethics and environmental impacts of research involving marine mammals: some brief (and biased) thoughts”; Dave Johnston and Andy Read, “Tagging marine mammals: ethics and field research”; Jason Baker, “Evaluating the effects of field research handling on study subjects: Hawaiian monk seal case study”; Pam Tuomi, “Ethics in captive marine mammal research”; Ian Boyd, “Professional ethics in marine mammal research”; C. Scott Baker and Phil Clapham, “The ethics of scientific

whaling: what are the alternatives?"; David Lavigne and Tim Ragen, "Recognizing the ethical dimensions of marine mammal science". Abstracts are posted on <http://moray.ml.duke.edu/faculty/read/smmethics2003>.

— News item courtesy INWR Digest Number 27 April 2004:
<http://www.ualberta.ca/~inwr/DIGEST/index.html>.

Midway births on the rise

With the current pupping season virtually complete on Midway Atoll, John Klavitter, a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, reports 16 registered monk seal births – a new record [see also [Midway births](#), TMG 5 (2): 2002]. The increase is especially striking in comparison to births during the 1980s and early 1990s, when only one pup was born each year. Limiting access to beaches at Midway since the Navy's departure, reports Klavitter, is undoubtedly partially responsible for the increase.

EndQuote

Hey dude, where's my fish?

Fell-McDonald said yesterday the encounter earlier this week was the second time he has been close to the same monk seal at the harbor.

He said the seal was very curious and looked like he was asking, "What's up, dude?"

Source: [Public reminded to avoid contact with monk seals](#), Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI, 27 February 2004.

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Mediterranean News

Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Download this page 

[Greece](#) / [Israel](#) / [Madeira](#) / [Mauritania & Western Sahara](#) / [Turkey](#)

Greece

Clear blue horizon for Dimitris

Monk seal orphan sets out to re-discover his world

STENI VALA, ALONISSOS, 22 May 2004 — He can hardly have known what all the fuss was about, as TV crews, journalists, politicians, sponsors and local residents assembled in this small fishing village to bid Greece's famous monk seal pup 'Dimitris' a fond farewell.

At 14.00 hrs on this bright sunny day in May, the world's rarest orphan was lifted out of [MOM's](#) mobile Intensive Care Unit by his nurses and veterinarians and nudged gently into his waiting transport cage. Once the protective towel had been removed from his head, Dimitris at last had a chance to see the well-wishers lining the route to the research vessel that would carry him out into the National Marine Park of Alonissos, Northern Sporades. Putting on a brave face for his big day, he took in the strange scene with whisker-twitching curiosity, betraying few signs of anxiety.

A local fisherman, a member of parliament for the region – Mrs Zeta Makri – a representative of corporate sponsor Pireus Bank – Mrs Sofia Staikou – the island's mayor – Mr Orestis Papachristou – and the mayor of another important monk seal island – Mr. Nikos Kanakis – then lifted the transport cage and began the brief walk to MOM's 13-meter research vessel, the '*IFAW Odyssea*'. In a highly symbolic gesture, the procession was led by the island's priest.



Dimitris in his transport cage.



Alonissos' priest leads the procession carrying Dimitris to the IFAW Odyssea.

"I cannot get over how things have changed," said an elated Eleni Tounta, MOM's Head of Alonissos Programme. "When we released our first orphaned pups we were virtually on our own. Now many people seem to be with us."

Dimitris was discovered following a violent December storm, stranded on a deserted beach on the eastern Aegean island of Karpathos [see [Monk Seal Orphan Rescued on Karpathos](#)]. The local fisherman who found the exhausted infant quickly raised the alarm – a testament, perhaps to changing attitudes in Greece, where fishermen have traditionally been hostile towards the species because of plummeting fish stocks and damaged nets. He spent the next 5 months in rehabilitation in MOM's Intensive Care Unit, helped along the way by a host of institutional and individual supporters [see [Monk Seal Pup on the Mend](#)].



Dimitris in December 2003, as an infant pup.

In the complex rehabilitation procedure, MOM worked with the Seal Rehabilitation and Research Centre ([SRRC](#)) of the Netherlands, the Veterinary School of Thessaloniki and the Virology Department of Erasmus University, Rotterdam.

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

Providing much-needed financial assistance was the Piraeus Bank of Greece; Princess Catherine Aga Khan; the [Marchig Animal Welfare Trust](#); members and supporters of MOM and readers of The Monachus Guardian [see [Big Day for Dimitris, the World's Rarest Seal](#)].

Once the pup was safely on board, the crew of the *Odyssia* wasted little time in casting off, and sailing out of Steni Valla's little bay.

Two hours later, they arrived off the coast of Gioura, an uninhabited island in the heart of the Marine Park. Dimitris, still in his transport cage, was then carried ashore to the pre-selected release site, a shingle beach in an open cave. At first, he seemed reluctant to leave the security of his cage, but was eventually coaxed out onto the beach by his carers. After a 10 minute spell, sniffing the unfamiliar scents of the shingle, he fell asleep, and dozed for the next half hour.

Then, at 17.52, approximately one hour after his arrival, he wriggled his way into the calm sea, and within moments was rediscovering the underwater world that had been lost to him after that fateful December storm — chasing after fish, exploring the rocks where the Gioura cliffs plunge into the sea.



Dimitris finds home on Gioura in the National Marine Park of Alonissos, Northern Sporades

After nightfall it was left up to a satellite several hundred kilometres above the Earth to track Dimitris' movements.

In the first few days following his release, Dimitris mostly stayed close to Gioura's shores, despite a brief one mile foray in an easterly direction towards the monk seal colony on the core zone island of Piperi. Lately, he has been more adventurous, exploring routes as far east as Aghios Efstratios.

Why all this fuss and effort for a single seal? Because Dimitris is a Mediterranean monk seal, Europe's most endangered marine mammal and the world's rarest seal species. Losing the fight for survival against forces ranging from industrial overfishing to uncontrolled mass tourism, the species is also a powerful ecological symbol of the threats facing the entire Mediterranean ecosystem. The fate of one is inextricably linked to the other, a fact that — thanks to Dimitris and others of his kind — politicians, industry and fishermen are increasingly beginning to realise.

Can you also help?

Consider making a secure online donation: Funds are still urgently required to cover the

mounting costs of Dimitris' rehabilitation, and post-release care. [Your donation](#) can be made via Kagi, the leading Internet service that ensures swift, secure online payments by credit card.

Doubts confront management authority on Alonissos

As the management authority of the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades gathered for its third meeting on the island on 3 June, members faced a demoralising agenda item: a complete absence of resources to undertake their government-mandated mission.

The authority held its inaugural meeting in August 2003, [see [Management authority convenes on Alonissos](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003], amid a renewed sense of optimism that the state was finally taking its conservation obligations seriously in Greece's first National Marine Park.

Since then, however, a change in government in Athens, and a political agenda dominated by the summer Olympics, has seen the best intentioned plans for marine parks and protected areas in the country begin to unravel at the seams.

Despite pledges of the former PASOK government that funds would be transferred to the first 25 management bodies created for protected areas last summer, there is still no sign of the missing money. That has left Greece's flagship Marine Park with no guards or patrol boats, no vehicles, no office, and no staff.

Some worry that, without government intervention, the NMPANS may be destined to follow in the notorious footsteps of the Marine Park of Zakynthos set up, amid international concern, to protect marine turtle nesting sites [see [Challenge in the Ionian](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002].

There, Greece's first protected area management body has collapsed financially, and former employees – including guards – are in the courts, suing for non-payment of wages.

Another worry is that even previous government pledges lack a commitment to funding consistency – possibly because of a reliance on term-limited grants from the EU. Indeed, the previous government made it known that the NMPANS and the management authorities of other Greek protected areas would receive just 75% of their funding needs in the first year, 50% in the second, 25% in the third and thereafter, nothing at all. The implication was that the protected areas would then be left to their own devices to raise funds – a sink or swim privatization model that, despite certain merits, also holds considerable risk as management authorities debate the commercial exploitation of the areas under their control while fighting for their own survival.

While such issues remain to be clarified and resolved, the NMPANS is facing the summer tourist season with no guards or patrol boats. [MOM](#), Greece's leading monk seal NGO, and a member of the Park management authority, halted its own guarding efforts at the end of 2003 on the understanding that the authority would overtake responsibility for the programme. The organization even offered the use of its own patrol boat, 'Alonnisos', and its trained guards with 15 years' experience, to facilitate the programme.

In its latest meeting, however, the management authority could only decide to request urgent funding support for the guarding operation from the Ministry of Environment. If the lesson of Zakynthos is anything to go by, however, they may be in for a long wait. – WMJ.

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.

Final pup tally

MOM's research team recorded 18 monk seal births during the 2003-2004 reproduction season in the organisation's three main study areas.

Five newborn seals were recorded in the core zone of the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades, 8 in the Kimolos-Polyaigos area and 5 in the area of N. Karpathos-Saria. – Panos Dendrinis, MOM.

Who killed the Skopelos seal?

MOM has demanded that action be taken by the Port Police authorities to identify the killer of a seal, found dead on the island of Skopelos on 1 May 2004. Skopelos lies to the west of Alonissos, outside the Northern Sporades Marine Park.

The young male seal was found dead on Milies beach, 1-2 days after the killing.

The Port Police office in Glossa subsequently alerted MOM staff on Alonissos. A necropsy performed by MOM biologists revealed that the animal had been shot. A bullet, misshapen by striking the skull, was removed from the 3 cm head wound.



Dead on Milies beach.



The bullet removed from the dead seal, misshapen by the force of entry, still shows the etched 'G' of its manufacture.

Although direct killing by fishermen remains the primary cause of mortality for the species in Greece, such incidents have been virtually unheard of in the neighbouring NMPANS for a decade or more. Indeed, local fishermen on Alonissos were among the first to condemn the killing, and noted that prevailing currents appeared to make it unlikely that the seal had been shot in their fishing grounds.

In letters to the Port Police, MOM requested an investigation of the incident, and for measures to be taken to prevent any possible recurrence. Fishermen are not permitted to carry firearms aboard their vessels, although the law is often flouted.

NetWatch

“The two biggest threats are the destruction of its habitat, and the fact that monk seals are still being deliberately killed by fishermen on account of the fact that monk seals do go to nets and take fish off the nets. We’ve been working on this for quite some time on both topics. We’ve been trying to set up marine parks and sites where the monk seals are at present, but also I think the more difficult problem is working with the fishermen, trying to find solutions regarding this issue of damage to their nets. Fishermen appreciate the fact that the real problem is not the monk seals, the real problem is the fact of dwindling resources. Greece is a country where 95% of our fisheries fleet is composed of small-scale coastal fisheries. Small boats, less than 7 or 8 metres in length, really subsistence level fishing, and it’s important for us, not only for reasons dealing with our history but also reasons dealing with the management resources that these fishing boats do remain alive, that these fishermen do stay in their business. And I think it can be done in the future, but the bet is certainly open with regards to monk seals.” – Demetres Karavelles, CEO of WWF-Greece.

Source: Earthbeat ABC Radio Australia, 13 March 2004.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/earth/stories/s1062760.htm>

Seal on Alonissos trades shyness for the beach

A male monk seal frequenting the southern coasts of Alonissos is displaying some uncharacteristic behaviour for a species whose temperament in recent history is most often described as shy, retiring and even monastic in nature. This particular individual has been hauling out onto beaches on Alonissos, in the Northern Sporades Marine Park, generating alerts to the local MOM office by baffled fishermen and startled tourists. Despite initial concerns last September when the seal was sighted occupying a small beach just outside the village of Votsi, the animal did not appear to be suffering from anything more acute than wounds to its rear flippers (a common injury among competing adult males). And since then, sighting the seal on an open beach has become an increasingly common occurrence. In early June, in fact, townsfolk of Alonissos' main settlement, Patitiri, were amazed to find the seal asleep on the beach only a few metres away from shops, tavernas, and the busy hydrofoil port. – WMJ.



Relaxing on Patitiri beach.

Nutshell Priorities	
€ 1 billion +	€ 0
Amount committed by the Greek government for security for the summer Olympics...	Amount committed by the Greek government for security of monk seal protected areas...
Source: Athens News, 4-10 June 2004	

Progress in Kimolos and Karpathos

As part of MOM's EU-funded LIFE-Nature project *The Monk Seal: Conservation Actions in two Greek NATURA 2000 Sites*, the following environmental education activities have been conducted on the islands of Kimolos and Karpathos:

- In January 2004, a reading contest was held for the children of the project areas, entitled "Reading Battles". It was organized by MOM, in response to the children's request that we repeat last year's contest that was received with enthusiasm from both pupils and parents. MOM provided copies of the books on environmental topics to all participants. In May, referee panels consisting of local teachers and MOM staff evaluated the children's answers and the winners were awarded prizes, such as binoculars and cameras, that aim to further encourage their interest in the natural environment of their areas.
- In March 2004 MOM, in collaboration with the Natural History Museum of Crete, organized environmental education activities for the pupils of the Karpathos project area. The schoolchildren of the traditional villages of Olympos and Diafani attended a slide show on the local fauna and flora and the ecological significance of this NATURA 2000 site. The children also participated in a field trip, where they had the opportunity to find and identify local endemic animal and plant species frequenting a typical insular ecosystem.
- In April and May 2004 MOM, in collaboration with the WWF Greece, organized an educational seminar for the pupils of both project areas on the impact of fisheries on the conservation of the marine environment.
- During the summer of 2004, the Information Centers previously established during this

project will continue their operation with the help of numerous volunteers.

- A short documentary film (30 minutes duration) on the monk seal, the significance of each site and the objectives of the LIFE project was produced. It includes footage from the project areas and activities, captured by a film crew that joined the field teams on site. The film will be presented in all MOM's Information Centers, while contacts are being made with several TV stations to broadcast it.
- The Port Police Station in Diafani, Karpathos, was established in late autumn of 2003 – a key demand for the effective protection of the marine area of this site. The new Station is manned by three officers and though well equipped, it still lacks a patrol vessel or road vehicle – equipment that would obviously facilitate the surveillance of the area. The project's Karpathos site manager is in regular contact with the Port Police Officers, to keep them informed about the project's activities and to promote our collaboration for the effective protection of the marine area of Northern Karpathos-Saria.
- With the aim of informing visitors to Northern Karpathos and Saria about the unique natural beauty of the area and the rare species found within it, MOM has designed and has started to construct a series of ecological signposts. This activity is being conducted in collaboration with the Community Council authorities of Olympos and the Management Body of Northern Karpathos-Saria. An external consultant, specialized in the design of environmental information material, is assisting MOM's team. The signs will be posted at key locations of the project sites by the autumn of 2004.
- The Special Environmental Study for Kimolos-Polyaigos has been sent to the co-competent Ministries of Development, Agriculture and Merchant Marine for consultation before its approval by the Director General for the Environment.

– Stella Adamantopoulou, MOM.

EndQuote

Monk seals and Alonissos – A cool combination

“The green Aegean oasis of Alonissos, part of the Sporades chain, is only one hour by hydrofoil from busy Skiathos. With just one public bus, no airport and four taxis, it might be the least-traveled island in the northern Aegean.

By keeping tourism in check, the island has preserved much of its natural beauty. This is a haven of trails, delicate cliff-side chapels and the National Marine Park of Alonissos, established in 1992 to protect the endangered Mediterranean monk seal. Small sailboats, often with dolphins close by, cruise the uninhabited islets of the pristine sea park. Sailors drop anchor at nearby Peristera and spend an afternoon snorkeling over sunken ships or swim ashore and hike on trails dotted with juniper trees and wild orchids.”

Source: [The six coolest GREEK ISLANDS you've never heard of – Alonissos](#). San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, March 14, 2004.

Mediterranean News continues with [Israel](#), [Madeira](#), [Mauritania & Western Sahara](#), and [Turkey](#)...

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

[Greece](#) / [Israel](#) / [Madeira](#) / [Mauritania & Western Sahara](#) / [Turkey](#)

Israel

Confusion over Israeli stranding

Debate – and lingering confusion – continues amongst scientists regarding the identity of a seal washed ashore on “Dolphinarium Beach” in Tel Aviv on 27 January 2004.

According to an announcement by Dan Kerem and Oz Goffman of IMMRAC (Israel Marine Mammal Research & Assistance Center), the decaying body was discovered partly buried on the beach. It was subsequently moved to the Maritime School in Mikhmoret for further inspection.

Kerem and Goffman reported that “the body was recognized as that of a seal, most likely a female, but was already in an advanced state of decomposition and disintegration. The caudal remains were no more than the skin of the belly, to which were attached the tail and remnants of the hind flippers. By a process of elimination, we believe that the body is that of a Mediterranean Monk seal (*Monachus monachus*), although the lack of the nose, vibrissae, front of the upper jaw and ilea, as well as a worn out, faded and peeling fur, have prevented us from making a definite identification.”

“As best we could judge,” they continued, “the body length (tip of snout to tip of tail) was ca. 120 cm, which if indeed a monk seal, would make the individual a few months old pup. On the one hand, this finding is exciting, considering that the last time a monk seal pup was observed in this area was in the mid 30’s. On the other hand, it is obvious that there are no active breeding caves anywhere near the beaching point. The decomposed state of the body, the low water temperature and the rough winter storms support the assumption that the body may have drifted a long distance.”

The authors went on to postulate that the animal – if indeed it was a monk seal – may have drifted towards Israel from the Cilician Basin in Turkey, Cyprus or even Cyrenaica in Libya.

Following preliminary examination of the photographic evidence, other experts also voiced the opinion that the dead animal was almost certainly a monk seal. According to others, however, the seal’s anatomical remains invited a different conclusion. Faxed drawings of the skull, compared with specimens held in the Zoological Museum in Cambridge in the UK, led Prof. Yoram Yom-Tov of Tel Aviv University to voice his opinion that the animal was not a monk but a young *Caspian* seal.

“I have no idea where it came from,” he admitted, “and can only guess that it was discarded by some zoo. However, as far as I know there were (and are) no Caspian seals in Israeli zoos, so it must have come from another country.”

Other experts have meanwhile reiterated their faith in the monk seal hypothesis.

A DNA analysis has yet to be conducted.

Madeira

Pup trails on the Desertas...

In the Desertas Islands Nature Reserve, the main objective of our monk seal monitoring at present is to follow the pup that was born in November – the third and final pup detected in 2003. True to recent trends, the pup is using the south of Deserta Grande – the area where the seals aggregate during the reproduction season. – Rosa Pires, Parque Natural da Madeira.

And detective work in Madeira

In addition, our patrols around the islands and our dialogue with the fishermen helps us to gain a better understanding about seal activity in other places around the islands.

Monk seal sightings around Madeira Island have become something of a regular occurrence of late [see [Sightings collected, advice dispensed on Madeira](#), TMG 6 (1): June 2003], and we have discovered that at least three different males have been regularly observed around the eastern peninsula of Ponta de São Lourenço [see [Homeward Bound](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002]; one of these seals is using a cave located in the south of Madeira.



Madeira and the Ponta de São Lourenço.



The Natural Park boat, "Buteo".

Public awareness has been mainly directed towards schools and coastal communities with the aim of advising people how behave if they encounter a monk seal.

The Madeira Natural Park boat "Buteo" is used to promote the visits to the monk seal habitat in the middle schools. – Rosa Pires, Parque Natural da Madeira.

Further information

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

One pup – three "mothers"

For new insights into mother-pup behaviour in the Desertas Islands, see this issue's [In Focus](#), One pup - three "mothers" by Rosa Pires.

Mauritania & Western Sahara

Hopeful signs at Cabo Blanco

As a result of the continuous monitoring performed at Cabo Blanco during these last years, it has been possible to detect signs of a possible recovery in the monk seal colony, after it was decimated by the 1997 mass die-off that in a few months killed two thirds of the total seal population, 99% of them adults.

Counts of individuals performed at low tide in the two main caves used by seals suggests that this recovery is taking place. Although providing grounds for optimism, however, such information needs to be taken with caution. From 1997 until 2000, counts failed to show more than 45 animals in both caves. However, since 2001, when a maximum of 57 animals were counted, the occupation of caves has shown a slow but continuous growth. In 2004, maximum counts are around 70 animals, and a count performed not at low tide showed 89 animals in one of the caves.



Monk seals in a Cabo Blanco breeding cave.

In parallel to this possible recovery of the colony, a re-colonization of its local distribution area has also been detected – specifically, in the area north of the breeding caves, where seals almost disappeared after the mass die-off. This is a 7.2 km area dominated by cliffs in which some adult males of the colony are established and maintain aquatic territories. Prior to the die-off, up to 24 animals were recorded there. Following that event and up until 2002, 4 animals were regularly observed there. During the last marine expeditions to the area undertaken at the end of 2003, however, up to 15 different adult males were observed under the cliffs.

Also, the incidence of (non-pup) seals found dead on the regularly-patrolled beaches south of the breeding caves has shown a promising decrease. The average number of carcasses located each year was 4 but has decreased to one in these last two years. In May 2001, fishing gear began to disappear from the entrance of the breeding caves and from the areas used regularly by seals.

The colony's productivity remains constant during the last years, maintaining an average of 25 annual births and pup mortality rates fluctuating between 40 and 55%, depending on the weather conditions of each year.

Taken collectively, the data makes us guardedly optimistic about the recovery of the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony. – Miguel Angel Cedenilla & Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat.

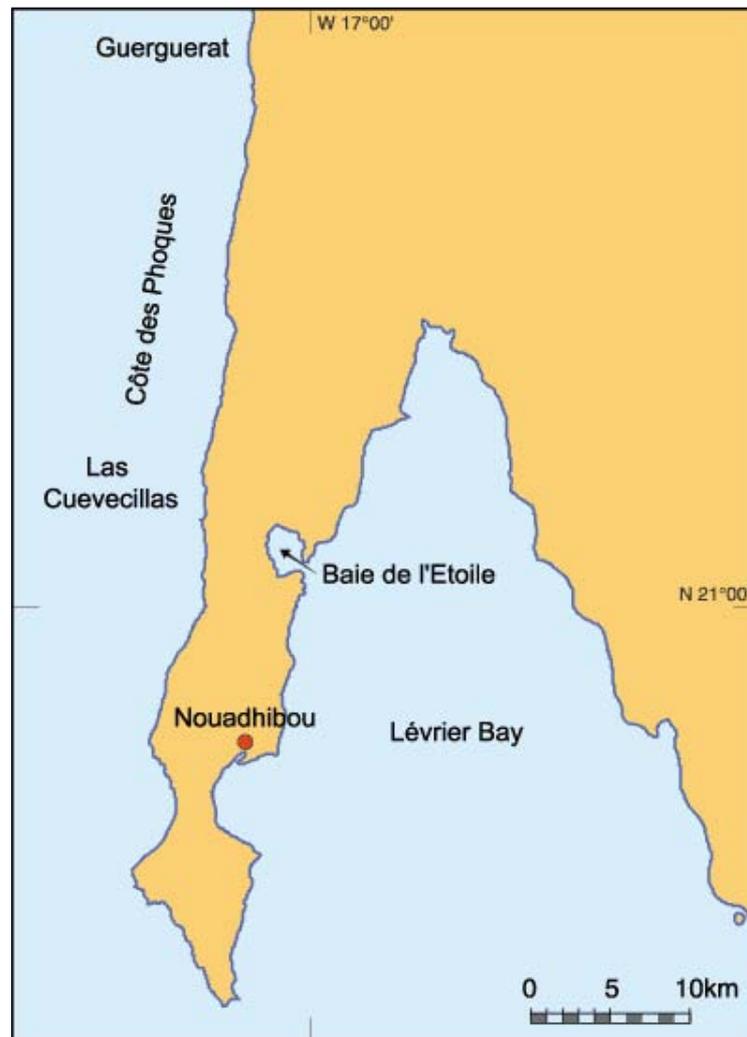
Amrigue's story, a rehabilitated seal

Amrigue is already 7 years old. Rescued as a one month old pup during the 1997 mass die-off that claimed the life of his mother, he is now an adult male. Regular observations seem to indicate that he moves around Greyhound Bay.

He was born in one of the Cabo Blanco breeding caves and rescued on 24 May 1997. After a rehabilitation period of 4 months in the Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic and Fisheries

Research (IMROP), he was released on 20 September. Prior to the release, plastic tags were applied to its rear flippers, as well as a satellite transmitter that allowed tracking during the following 55 days.

Immediately after his release, he moved towards the south of the Cabo Blanco peninsula and the Banc D'Arguin National Park area. He spent almost two months in this area moving back and forth and even suffered a capture attempt on a National Park beach by a fisherman who thought he was something "eatable". In November 1997, tracking signals were lost just as he was entering Greyhound Bay (Levrier Bay).



Since then, however, Amrigue has been sighted on several occasions by fishermen, and members of IMROP and CBD-Habitat. In 1998 he was observed and identified near the Bay of the Star (Baie de L'Etoile), a small bay inside Greyhound Bay. Later on, we learnt about his progress thanks to interviews with the fishermen of the area who even told us that he had moulted, attaining the typical adult male black pelage.

At the end of 2003, he was located once again and identified thanks to the plastic tags that he still has on his rear flippers. Since then, he is observed frequently at specific points of Greyhound Bay, allowing monitoring of his locations and movements.

Despite his healthy condition, Amrigue has not been seen and identified in the breeding caves area, on the opposite side of the Cabo Blanco peninsula. The distance which separates the breeding caves from Amrigue's location is around 80 km. This distance should not be a problem for a monk seal, but the territorial behaviour of adult males makes us think that he maintains an aquatic territory inside the Bay. Hopefully, time will tell us about his movements and about how his behaviour develops. – Miguel Angel Cedenilla & Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat.

Monk seal carcass in Banc D'Arguin National Park

In April, technicians at the Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic and Fisheries Research (IMROP) informed CBD-Habitat staff that a monk seal carcass had been found on Mamghar's beach, at the southern limit of Banc D'Arguin National Park. The distance from the Cabo Blanco monk seal colony is around 400 km. The carcass was in a decomposed state, preventing the taking of necropsy samples that might otherwise have allowed us to determine of the cause of death.

Although we have received sightings for several years from the area, this is the first time that a dead monk seal has been recorded this far south from the colony.



A pair of monk seals born at Cabo Blanco were subsequently tracked moving towards the Banc D'Arguin area.

Monk seal presence in the National Park of Banc D'Arguin (PNBA) has always been considered irregular and scarce. Nevertheless, sightings collected as a result of recent interviews with fishermen of the different villages inside the National Park, has indicated that monk seal presence inside the boundaries of the Park is more regular than originally thought.

Results of the interviews, performed by PNBA personnel in collaboration with CBD-Habitat, show how local fishermen are aware of monk seals and have had some encounters with them in the Park

during their lives. Encounters are not regular, but due to the low population inhabiting the Park, its large shoreline and marine extension, as well as the labyrinthine channels that form its sandbanks and its shallow waters, monk seal feeding presence inside the National Park limits may well be higher than first supposed — these factors all adding to the difficulty in locating or sighting them.

Two animals born in the Cabo Blanco colony and tracked by telemetry devices, showed movements towards the Banc D'Arguin area, where they stayed for more than a month before they returned back north to the Cabo Blanco peninsula.

Such information suggests that the PNBA is an important area for the monk seals of the Cabo Blanco colony, and that its role in the conservation of the species should be evaluated in the future, taking into account the high intensity fishing activity, both industrial and artisanal, which takes place outside its boundaries. – Miguel Angel Cedenilla & Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa, CBD-Habitat.

Mediterranean News continues with [Turkey...](#)

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Mediterranean News

Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Download this page 

[Greece](#) / [Israel](#) / [Madeira](#) / [Mauritania & Western Sahara](#) / [Turkey](#)

Turkey

Turkish government pledges 5 new protected areas for the Monk Seal

A press conference on the status of Important Monk Seal Sites in Turkey was held in Istanbul in 7 May 2004. The conference, held in the historical Ciragan Palace, was organized jointly by the Turkish Ministry of Environment & Forests and SAD-AFAG through the catalyzing support of Mrs. Zeynep Karahan Uslu, Parliament member, who has recently adopted a monk seal from AFAG's "adopt a monk seal" campaign and who has a sympathetic approach to marine environment protection.

In the press conference, Mr. Osman Pepe, Environment & Forests Minister made a keynote speech in which he emphasized the importance of protection of the endangered monk seal along Turkish coasts and pledged that 5 Important Monk Seal Sites (enjoying priority among 12 sites originally proposed) will have improved protection status through "Species Protection/Management Areas" according to IUCN criteria. The Minister also stated that such a status shall be included in the draft "Nature Protection Act" which is under preparation by his ministry. In accordance with the joint declaration by SAD-AFAG and the Ministry of Environment & Forests, the Minister stated that first the Foça Monk Seal Site shall be enlarged, while the status "Species Protection/Management Area" shall first be applied to Cilician coasts. Yalçın Savas, attending the press conference on behalf of SAD-AFAG, then made a short technical presentation about the 5 Important Monk Seal Sites. This was followed by AFAG's new short documentary film on monk seals on Turkish coasts.



Left to right: Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG; Nuri Uslu, Deputy Undersecretary; Osman Pepe, Minister of Environment & Forests; Zeynep Karahan Uslu, Parliament member and Mustafa Kemal Yalınkılıç, General Director for Nature Protection & National Parks.

The press conference was attended by a large audience, including TV camera crews and newspaper journalists, environmentalists and the public. Mrs. Zeynep Karahan Uslu also made an appealing statement to the media on her affinity to monk seals and her satisfaction in being a "parent" of a monk seal.

The Important Monk Seal Sites of Turkey were identified and reported to the National Monk Seal Committee of Turkey by SAD-AFAG in 1998 [see [Endgame: the fight for marine protected areas in Turkey](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002]. The 5 monk seal sites having priority are Gökçeada, Foça & Karaburun, Alaçati & Sigacik, Bodrum Peninsula and Cilician coasts, identified by SAD-AFAG through research activities dating back to 1987.



Following this commitment by the Minister, we expect that at least these 5 designated sites will enjoy a stronger and more stable protection status under the proposed “Nature Protection Act”, that will be drafted with harmonization to relevant EU Acquis measures on nature protection in mind. – Cem Orkun Kiraç, SAD-AFAG.

Seal in need

On 22 April 2004, we received a phone call alerting us that an ailing seal was drifting on the sea at Aliaga in Çandarlı Bay (in the Izmir region of the Aegean).



A veterinary examination indicated that the seal may have passed through a toxic chemical.



Diverse medications, including cortisone and antibiotics, were administered by the SAD-AFAG team.

When SAD-AFAG Foça researchers reached the site, the animal was found exhausted, unable to dive, floating on the surface and nearly stranded on the beach. Earlier, staff from a nearby petrol station as well as one of our volunteers, Mr Salih Yildirim of SUKOT, attended the animal, checking its condition and taking photos. The seal, however, had not responded to their intervention. Following our arrival, we warned all bystanders to leave. After examining the seal – a young adult female (approx. 2m in length) – from a distance and taking necessary identification pictures, we decided to bring the animal ashore in an effort to lessen heat loss. We feared that the seal – outwardly in good physical condition – might be suffering from an acute, and possibly fatal, illness.

During our first period of observation, we consulted [MOM](#) and [SRRC](#) experts about the situation. The animal returned to sea after 2.5 hours of resting. Two and a half hours later we found her in another bay, again almost stranded and exhausted. Together with the help of Mr. Avni Gök, a veterinarian for the Municipality of Foça, the seal was again examined. The skin of the animal was found to be covered with a layer of oil and partially covered with small patches of tar. Moreover, toxic burning was determined in and around her mouth, around her eyes (possibly an explanation of why the animal kept closing her eyes). After the examination, we concluded that the animal must have passed through a floating toxic chemical agent of some kind.

We were not able to take blood samples nor record the body temperature since the animal was difficult to restrain. The following medication was applied to the animal: locally a cortisone-based eye ointment (Hydrocortisone acetate and chloramphenicol); against secondary infections an antibiotic (active agent: amoksisilin 2,5g) was injected intramuscularly. Against parasites, avermectin (5cc) was injected intramuscularly. Prednisolon (4 ampules) was also injected intramuscularly to boost the animal's general condition.

The animal was then released. Though we searched for the seal during the following week, we could find no trace of her. In order to improve our sighting chances, a press release was distributed. Feedback was received on 30th of April to the effect that a monk seal had been sighted in the same area. However, the information is not detailed enough to determine whether the animal was the same individual. Unfortunately, despite our sighting efforts, we remain uncertain as to the fate of this seal. – Harun Güçlüsoy, SAD-AFAG.

Coastal Zone project draws to a close – but follow-up is now essential

Readers who have followed progress of this project in previous issues of TMG may also remember that effective management plans for protected areas, stakeholder participation in the conservation process and no-fishing zones to benefit seals, fishermen and the marine ecosystem at large, were among the principal objectives of SAD-AFAG's collaborative project with WWF MedPO [see [Coastal Zone Management Project Commences](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002, [Progress reported in coastal zones project](#), TMG 5 (2) November and [Further progress for coastal zones project](#), TMG 6 (1): June 2003].

Due to close by December 2004, here are some of the project's principal accomplishments, and activities that require follow-up:

Management Plans: Detailed coastal zone management (CZM) plans, prepared for Foça-Yeni Foça-Karaburun in the Aegean and Aydıncık in the Cilician Basin, were submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests in December 2002 (2 of 5 "Important Monk Seal Sites" selected by the National Monk Seal Committee). Just recently, on 7 May 2004, (see [Turkish Government pledges 5 new protected areas for the Monk Seal](#), this issue) Mr. Osman Pepe, The Minister of Environment and Forests, expressed the ministry's intention to establish these sites as well as three other important monk seal sites to be protected in the near future.

No Fishing Zones: Out of 6 No Fishing Zones (1 on Karaburun Peninsula and 5 in the Cilician Basin) proposed by the Technical Seal Committee of the National Monk Seal Committee, 3 were subsequently established: one in Ayıbalığı, Karaburun Peninsula, and two in Kizilliman and Melleç in the Cilician. Though the 4th one had twice been proposed by SAD-AFAG and the Aydıncık Fishing Cooperative, the proposal failed to be taken up as an agenda item in meetings of the Advisory Group of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. We have, however, been assured that the proposal will be discussed at the main meeting of the committee which will be held in June/July 2004.

New Patrolling System in Aydıncık: A new patrol boat was launched in June 2003, according to a system in force in Foça. A proposal that the Gendarmerie assume responsibility for guarding was eventually rejected due to administrative reasons. SAD-AFAG therefore requested that the Aydıncık Governorship overtake the guarding of the area, a proposal that was subsequently accepted. A protocol will be signed between the Governorship and SAD-AFAG in June 2004 to activate this system.

Project results published:

Güçlüsoy, H. Savas, Y., Veryeri, N.O., Bolat, A., Kiraç, C.O., Veryeri, N., Çigdem, A., Çağlayan, Y., Aslan, Y., Öner, Ç., Yolak, U. 2004. Akdeniz'de Biyoçeşitlilik Hassas Noktaların Korunması : Türkiye Proje Sonuçları. E. Özhan ve H. Evliya Eds. Türkiye'nin Kıyı ve Deniz Alanları V. Ulusal Konferansı, Türkiye Kiyıları 04 Konferansı Bildiriler Kitabı, 4-7 Mayıs 2004, Adana, 63-71.

Project draws Greek and Turkish colleagues together

A project funded by the European Commission is encouraging the flow of expertise and experience between Greek and Turkish monk seal conservationists.

The project ("Capacity Building Over the Aegean – Twinning of Environmental NGOs [SAD-AFAG](#), Turkey and [MOM](#), Greece") runs from 1 January – 30 June 2004.

The project's overall objective is to increase the institutional capacity of SAD-AFAG in Turkey – a prospective Candidate Country for EU membership – through cooperative ties with its Greek counterpart, MOM. Meetings between the two sides will help SAD-AFAG gain access to MOM's experience in various fields, including

- How to build and maintain the supporter-base of SAD-AFAG in Turkey, and how to run a volunteer programme.
- How to develop the capacity of SAD-AFAG administrative staff in terms of NGO financial management.
- How to gain information about EC Acquis on environment protection, especially on coastal zone management and marine species conservation.

Tour agent lends support

TUSSOCK Tourism, which organises 'Blue Voyages' under sail along the Turkish coast, has made a donation towards [SAD-AFAG](#) conservation activities. During the previous tourist season, TUSSOCK launched a fund raising and awareness campaign among its customers and subsequently donated 2,300 Euros to SAD-AFAG to be used in aid of the monk seal. At a press conference held on 25 February 2004 in Bodrum to inform the public about the contribution, the manager of TUSSOCK stated that the company will continue collecting donations for SAD-AFAG activities. All tourism activities in the region are, in fact, using the habitats of monk seals, marine turtles and Audouin's gulls as capital. Conserving these species and their habitats is the most important provision for tourism sustainability. Ensuring that their operations do not inflict harm upon nature, while providing financial donations towards conservation activities, would represent a significant step for the future of the tourism sector. – Yesim Aslan & Yalçın Savas, SAD-AFAG.

Ecosystems at Bozyazi high school

Responding to an invitation from the geography teacher of Bozyazi High School, SAD-AFAG's local project assistant organised a seminar for students on the Mediterranean ecosystem, the monk seals and the importance of Marine Conservation Areas.

Bozyazi in the Cilician Basin, on Turkey's southern Mediterranean coast, also acts as a regional office for SAD-AFAG. 394 students took part in the seminar in 36 lessons. In total during 2003, 1434 Bozyazi students learnt about monk seals and their habitats. – Yesim Aslan & Ahmet Bolat, SAD-AFAG.



Bozyazi educational seminar.

Publication project SAD-AFAG

SAD-AFAG is running a publication project entitled “Integrating Locals in the Conservation of Foça and Karaburun’s Marine Ecosystem” with the support of GEF-SGP Turkey. Within the project SAD-AFAG has prepared 5 brochures, 2 posters, 1 story book for kids and a sticker. The brochures focus on the monk seal, fisheries and No-Fishing-Zones in Turkey, and the work of SAD-AFAG. The posters feature the Marine Protected Areas in Foça and Karaburun. The children’s book is a story book about monk seals and the marine ecosystem, with both games and educational information. And the sticker, a tool in SAD-AFAG’s developing rescue network, provides contact information in case any member of the public encounters dead, sick or orphaned monk seals. These materials will be distributed free of charge to local fishermen, children and local people of Foça and Karaburun. – Yesim Caglayan.

New adult male monk seal identified in Karaburun

N. Ozan Veryeri, senior field researcher at SAD-AFAG’s Karaburun Project Office, identified a new monk seal individual along the coasts of Büyükada Island near Karaburun on 30 May 2004 during a routine field survey. Over a long period of time, Ozan photographed and filmed the new adult male monk seal that has a patchy pale pelage and distinctive markings.



The new individual has been added to the “identified seals” catalogue of AFAG and will soon be named through voting among AFAG members and “parents” adopting monk seals along Turkish coasts. Considering the scarcity of male individuals in the area, this adult male might play an important role in the demographic structure of the local monk seal population. – Cem Orkun Kiraç, SAD-AFAG.

Restrictions posted at Foça SPA

Signs and buoys listing access restrictions to the Siren Rocks core zone of the Foça Specially Protected Area have recently been installed. These replace earlier large signboards on the Rocks that were quickly toppled in the exposed weather conditions.



Restriction buoy at the Siren Rocks.



Marble plate restrictions signs are affixed to the Siren Rocks.

This time, the regulations have been carved on marble plates and affixed to the rocks. The southern sign reads:

“You are at the southern cape of the Siren Rocks of Orak Island, Foça Monk Seal Protection Area. Navigating, swimming, diving, walking and sunbathing are among the activities that are prohibited at the Siren Rocks. It is forbidden to pass beyond this point.

Additionally, camping, lighting campfires and staying overnight is prohibited throughout the Foça Islands, with the exception of Incir Island. Hunting is not permitted on any of the Islands. We thank you for your kind support for the conservation of the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal by not passing beyond this point, and by strictly observing the regulations.”

– Yalcin Savas, SAD/AFAG.

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Cover Story

Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Download this article 

ARAB THE PILGRIM

Ali Cemal Gucu and Meltem Ok

Middle East Technical University
Institute of Marine Sciences (METU-IMS)

Almost 10 years ago, the first pup identified by the METU-IMS team in the Cilician Basin was named "Arab" because of his paradoxically bright dark coloration. He was, probably, the son of the dominant male in the region called "Kahramanmarasliabdullah" or "KAMASH" for short. Later, as the data on the seals of the Cilician basin were accumulated, so the social structure of the colony started to become evident and suggested that a large adult male rules over a region with an arbitrarily estimated home range of 37 to 56 km. Within the range of a single adult male, the rest of the individuals tend to gather into small and separate groups. Each group was then observed using only certain caves within each of the sub-regions. This sub-group structure (a single adult male with one or more reproductive females using selectively the same caves) may resemble a form of polygyny. Habitat partitioning by sub-groups exclusively using certain caves, the presence of home ranges for each of the adult males, and the presence of a single adult male per social group were indicators of territorial behaviour.



Figure 1. The locations of the recent seal sightings in the Levant Sea.

Although no evidence, such as defensive behaviour of territories at sea or in the caves was observed or reported during research in the Cilician Basin, the study also failed to answer a

significant question: what happens to the male pups when they attain sexual maturity. Do they find a shelter within their own sub-region, or are they forced to abandon the territory of the dominant male?

Recently, on 8th February 2004, late in the afternoon, two seals were sighted in front of the tall buildings of Mersin city by locals. The site is 100 km away from the nearest boundary of a territory determined in the study. It would be hard believe that a pair of seals would ever appear in such an urbanised area had they not been videotaped by an amateur cameraman. The seals apparently feasted from a fishing net, stayed at the site for a while and then vanished towards the west. Next day, early in the morning, a Coast Guard boat commander sighted a seal within the Gulf of Iskenderun, nearly 100 n. miles east of the first sighting site. The distance between the 2 sightings clearly indicated that they were not the same seals. From the distinct patch on the seal's belly, the commander identified the animal as an adult male. These were the first data to reach the monk seal conservation team of the METU-IMS through the newly launched seal sightings network to follow the migratory trails of the monk seal in the Gulf of Iskenderun.

Later, the network enabled the METU-IMS team to track this male seal along his way to the Syrian border where he now seems to have settled (see Figure 1). According to the local fishermen, without whom the data would have never been collected, this is typical behaviour of the seals sighted in the area. On irregular intervals, seal(s) are sighted, stay in the area for 10 to 20 days and disappear for a long while. A female sighted last year at the same place, bearing wounds at the rear part of her body, (descriptions given by the observers are identical to mating wounds on a female) indicates that the area is not only visited by the same individual.

Now, within the framework of the new monk seal research project jointly carried out in the Gulf of Iskenderun by METU-IMS and BTC Co Pipeline company [see [Perspectives](#), TMG 6 (2): December 2003], the caves in the area that are suitable for seal use were equipped with infrared monitors. This is essentially the same approach that had previously been successfully applied to understand cave use patterns and for photo-identification of the seals along the Cilician coast. There, TrailMaster infrared monitoring systems were used to monitor seal activity in caves. The system has three components: a transmitter, a receiver and a 35-mm camera with a built-in flash. The transmitter and the receiver were set and aligned 20–30 cm above the floor of the cave and the camera was placed in a location that permitted the best view of the seals. The transmitter emitted infrared pulses every 0.05 s and the receiver recorded an event when the infrared beam was broken for a second or longer (20 consecutive missed pulses=1.0 s). This value was short enough to record a seal's passing through the beam and long enough not to record a false event such as those caused by flying bats, water splashes, etc. Each event was stored in the receiver by date and time. The receiver automatically activated the camera when an event occurred. To prevent depleting the entire roll of film by multiple events occurring shortly after one another, the camera was delayed for 90 min after an event. Infrared monitors and cameras were installed in the three most actively used caves but two of the systems were destroyed during a storm. Data from two of the caves were disregarded, as the collection could not be applied for a complete year due to mechanical damage. The data recorded at cave Dehliz were later analysed for activity patterns (Figure 2).

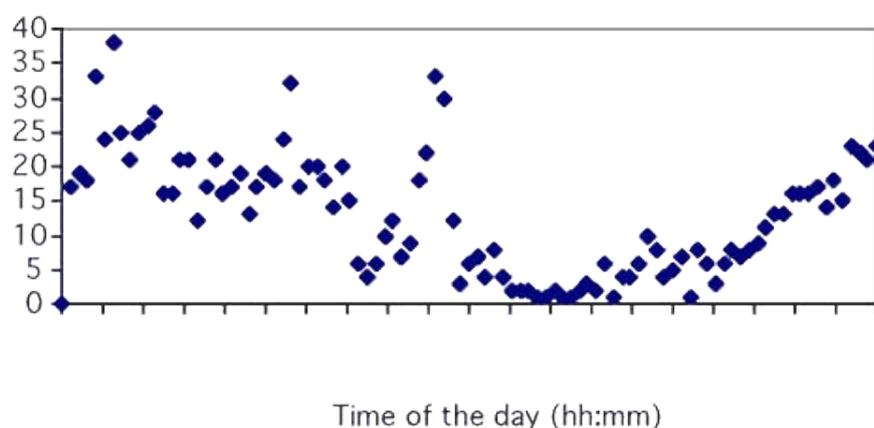


Figure 2. Activity patterns at cave Dehliz.

Seal photographs from three of the caves were used for individual identification. The female seen in Photo 1 is recognized by the dense mating scars on the back and circle shaped mark on her left shoulder.



Photo 1. Caught on camera: a female seal with dense mating scars.

Of particular importance to identification criteria, the pictures also provided useful information on the colour ranges of individuals, revealing how pelt colour may change within a couple of hours and turn from black to light grey (Photo 2 and 3) due to drying.



Photo 2. The camera picks up the change in pelt colour, from black...



Photo 3. ... to light grey.

In another instance, a cave lacking a suitably large platform on which a seal could comfortably rest, and hence not initially considered important by the research team, was later proven by the monitoring system to be the most actively used cave in the area (Photo 3). Careful scrutiny of this photograph reveals not only the individual on the platform, but also the flipper of a second seal in the water. A third individual can just be made out at the anterior of the seal on the platform. The greatest number of seals that researchers have observed sleeping side by side on the platform is 4.



Photo 4. A member of the research team 'hauls out' to demonstrate the size of the platform.

If the male seal is caught by the monitors during his current stay in the Iskenderun region, the images obtained will be compared with those recorded in the Cilician Basin to determine whether

the migratory seals sighted in the Levant Sea are, in fact, members of the same colony. If the hypothesis proves correct, and if the male recently sighted in the Gulf of Iskenderun is a member of the Cilician colony, it is unlikely to be anyone else but Arab, who by now has attained sexual maturity. Although the reasons why seals in the Levant Sea migrate is still unclear, the journey of Arab may be another compelling piece of evidence for territorial behaviour in the Mediterranean monk seal.

[Previous](#)[Contents](#)[Home](#)[Next](#)



ONE PUP - THREE “MOTHERS”

Rosa Pires, [Parque Natural da Madeira](#)

Last year in the Desertas Islands Nature Reserve, monk seals again used Tabaqueiro beach to breed. This open beach was first used in 1997 by two females (“Desertinha” and “Birisca”) and their pups [see [Saving seals at Madeira... a passionate affair](#), 6 (2): December 2003 and [Beach life, Desertas-style](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002]. That was great news, since it proved that the seals at Desertas, after 9 years of protection, were at last confident enough to return to their original breeding sites on open beaches. It was also an indication that our work was starting to produce meaningful results!

We observed the seals on Tabaqueiro beach again in 1999, then in 2001 and most recently in 2003 – always between November and January or February.

During the first years, an immature seal would sporadically join the adult mothers “Birisca” and “Desertinha” and their pups on the beach, but in 2003 something different happened...



Birisca and Desertinha with the pup at Tabaqueiro beach.



Birisca trying to convince the pup to return to the sea.

A young female, named “Riscagrande”, with a cute pup, joined the two experienced mothers on Tabaqueiro. To follow the behaviour of these three females and the pup was both fascinating and curious! It appeared that each female had its own specific task in caring for the pup. The task of “Riscagrande”, its “biological” mother, was mainly to feed him. Although she consequently spent less time in the bay, the pup was not alone when her mother disappeared for long periods. “Birisca” and “Desertinha” were excellent “nannies”, very concerned in taking care of him. In fact, the pup spent more time with “Birisca” and “Desertinha” than with his own mother. Quite often we observed the young pup trying to suckle from these females, but of course it was only with “Riscagrande” that he had any success.

The amazing thing was that these females shared their task respecting each other’s time. When the young pup returned from the sea, for example, a different female would look after him, thereby freeing the other to rest or feed.

Many other behaviours were equally fascinating: the females used to position their bodies so as to shield the pup from strong waves. They also used to force the pup to follow their movements

whether at sea or on land. What's more, we observed mock fights between them, when they exchanged positions and their duties towards the young seal.

Only on three occasions did one adult male share the beach to rest with this group of seals, although he did not have any contact with the females or the pup. This was the male that had been previously observed courting the females; in all probability, he was the father of this pup. In other years, however, this male was observed interacting with isolated pups on sea – a close interaction, rather more typical of the kind seen between mother and pup, involving frequent and close physical contact, such as nuzzling.

After all the field work, we've concluded that the chance of survival of this pup is higher, since he has not only one mother but three protecting him from trouble.

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

SENSITIVE SEA AREAS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL

Costas Marcus Triantafyllou

The designation of **Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas** in international waters was one of the main issues discussed at the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) recent 51st Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) meeting, which took place between 29 March – 2 April 2004 in London.

The 51st MEPC approved in principle the designation of three new PSSAs – in the Galapagos Archipelago, the Canary Islands Archipelago and the Baltic Sea area, with the exception of Russian waters. However, it was the latter that triggered extensive debate as to whether the designation of extensive sea areas is actually compatible with the PSSA concept.

A joint request was put forward by Russia, Liberia and Panama calling for an urgent review of existing IMO guidelines concerning the identification and designation of PSSAs. As clarified by a representative of the Russian Federation delegation, these three states do not oppose PSSAs in principle, but point out that the idea was originally developed to be applied to single ecosystems, not vast areas or entire seas.

That request was strongly supported by a paper jointly submitted by six leading industry bodies, namely Bimco, the International Chamber of Shipping, Intercargo, Intertanko, the International Parcel Tankers Association and the Oil Companies International Marine Forum. Far from rejecting the PSSA concept, the paper criticizes the “unchecked” proliferation of PSSAs, warning that standard will lose its special significance and become devalued unless the guidelines are reviewed to include a “rigorous” application process.

Guidelines for the Identification and Designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas are contained in resolution A.927(22) and state that a PSSA is an area that needs special protection through action by the IMO because of its significance for recognized ecological, socio-economic, or scientific reasons and which may be vulnerable to damage by international shipping activities.

Once a PSSA has been designated following formal approval by the IMO, the coastal state(s) concerned are required to propose Associated Protective Measures (APMs) which, under the PSSA guidelines, should increase protection of the area using mechanisms such as vessel traffic separation schemes, areas to be avoided, compulsory pilotage and strict application of MARPOL discharge and equipment requirements for ships, such as oil tankers.

A PSSA can also be protected by ships' routing measures – such as an area to be avoided: an area within defined limits in which either navigation is particularly hazardous or it is exceptionally important to avoid casualties and which should be avoided by all ships, or by certain classes of ships.

Therefore, as such measures have the potential to regulate the operation of shipping in general, the industry submission called on the IMO to look beyond its remit and take account of both land-based and waterborne sources of marine pollution when approving the designation of new areas and adopting APMs.

There are currently six designated PSSAs: the Great Barrier Reef, Australia (designated a PSSA in 1990); the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago in Cuba (1997); Malpelo Island, Colombia (2002);

around the Florida Keys, United States (2002); the Wadden Sea, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands (2002); and Paracas National Reserve, Peru (2003).

The substance of the 51st MEPC ruling means that current and future proposals for PSSAs will be assessed under existing guidelines until any review is sanctioned. However, the heated debate is likely to continue in the future and the European Commission has suggested that it intends to designate the Mediterranean as a PSSA at a later date.

Considering the highly endangered status of the Mediterranean monk seal and the vulnerability of remaining monk seal populations to a potentially catastrophic oil spill in areas such as the Northern Sporades archipelago, which provides refuge to the largest monk seal population in the Mediterranean, it will be interesting to learn the official position of the Greek government on such an issue, which preaches its commitment to support efforts for the survival of the species, but at international fora such as the IMO often confines its role to that of the protector of Greek shipping interests, as if environmental protection and prosperity of the shipping industry cannot co-exist.



The National Marine Park Alonissos-Northern Sporades – a potential candidate for PSSA status?

Wouldn't it be a far more proactive and positive stance on the part of the Greek government to support the PSSA concept by proposing the designation of areas such as the Northern Sporades archipelago and, in parallel, initiate discussions on the financial aspects – specifically, who will shoulder the cost of longer shipping routes – an issue that remains at the heart of this problem?

Many would argue that end users (i.e. consumers in affluent western societies of the so-called "developed countries"), if adequately informed about the potentially devastating impact of a large oil spill in the Northern Sporades area – an event that could conceivably mark the beginning of the end for the Mediterranean monk seal as a species – would be willing to contribute their fair share towards its survival by accepting a marginal increase in the retail prices for products, thus compensating somewhat for extra ship mileage.

Further info

[Sea Alarm to prepare for oil spill](#), The Monachus Guardian 4 (1): May 2001.

[Oil Spill At Çavus Island](#). A Clean-up Operation to Save Monk Seal Habitats at Gümüslük, SW Turkey. The Monachus Guardian 1 (1): May 1998.

[Sea Alarm Foundation](#). The Foundation Emergency Fund for Marine Mammals Sea Alarm ('Sea Alarm Foundation') was founded December 1999, in The Netherlands. Its objective is to offer assistance in the broadest sense to marine mammals and other marine wildlife that is in acute distress of a disaster.

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Letters to the Editor

Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

Download this page 

Pup catching plans draw fire

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tourism, ecotourism and the monk seal

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

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

– Anna Anderson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Population puzzle

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

– Elif Sevgi Kaynak, Pennsylvania, USA

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

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

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

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

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

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)



Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

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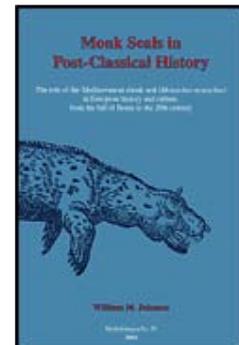
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Vol. 7 (1): June 2004

The **Monachus Guardian**
monachus / schauinslandi / tropicalis

Publishing Info

[Contents](#)

[Next](#)

[Previous](#)

[Home](#)

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[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

[Next](#)

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