



Vol. 5 (2): November 2002

Letters to the Editor

¿Which Park?

Before its creation in 1999, I did lobby for the inclusion of the monk seal cave areas within the National Marine Park of Zakynthos [See [Challenge in the Ionian](#), 5 (1): May 2002].

Unfortunately, I only managed to get the monk seal included in the law as one of the target species for the Park's creation. It is ironic that the habitat of the most endangered living seal is not included in a new European Marine Park, created by law to preserve it.

Tourist trips to breeding caves have been organised since the late nineties and at least four individuals (one juvenile and three adults) were killed between June 2000 and February 2001, to the complete indifference of the Park's management body.



West coast monk seal habitat: under siege by summer tourism?

Sea turtles are chased intensely by tourist boats and pedaloes in the island bay, from their arrival until they leave. I am certain that severe stress inflicted during that crucial period is too grave to permit their long term survival in the area. Similar harassment has led to the disappearance of local bottlenose dolphins in the Canaries.

The best forests within the Park have been burned. Meanwhile, the wardens walk up and down the beaches. During the first year, when more money was available, 60 of them were hired to cover 8 km of beach. A similar number is enough to provide the best guarding in Spain for Doniana National Park (80,000 Ha), more than ten times bigger than the Zakynthos NMP, including the sea surface.

I am not surprised if funds have already been depleted.

I was named a 2001 official consultant to the Park and after one year of mismanagement (in my opinion), I sent a strong letter to the management body, making my continuation as a consultant conditional upon clear improvements. It was never answered. Tourist trips to caves continue and, I guess, killings too. I do not know if funds are still granted to the Park. ¿Which Park?

Dr. Daniel Cebrian, [Calypso](#), Environmental Research Bureau, Milos, Greece

✓ **Editor's note:** Although little in the way of reliable information has been made available to the public, it appears that – like the National Marine Park of Alonissos, Northern Sporades – the Zakynthos NMP is facing a severe funding crisis, with planned conservation initiatives being deferred or cancelled and guards being laid off. The government's sudden reluctance to meet its financial obligations – possibly explained in part by the billions it is lavishing preparing for the 2004 Olympics – is likely to cause yet more sparks to fly in the European Union. The government's

abysmal track record in protecting marine turtle nesting sites on Zakynthos has already led to European Court judgements against the Greek state on several occasions.

Calypso, Environmental Research Bureau received the 2002 International Mediterranean Recognition award in June this year [see [International News](#), this issue].

Bucharest Calling

My name is Toti Marinescu and I'm Editor-in-Chief of Radio Pro FM Bucharest, a national network which includes PRO TV Television, a news agency, one paper and 21 radio stations. My hobby is to save the monk seal and to write about this splendid animal. This mammal was seen even in Romania 30 years ago, on isolated beaches. But now, with tourism, the seal has disappeared. It lived on Cape Kaliacra too, in Bulgaria.

I would like to correspond with anybody who shares my interest in the monk seal.

Toti Marinescu, Bucharest, Romania. Email: toti@profm.ro

Helping the Hawaiian

Please let me know whether or not a credible organization exists in helping to preserve the Hawaiian Monk Seal. I was born and raised in Hawai'i and have always appreciated this species from afar. I would like to help as much as possible.

Dan Glover, USA.

✓ **Editor's note:** We suggest you contact the following organisation to learn more about its Hawaiian monk seal conservation programme:

[KAHEA – The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance](#)
Honolulu, Oahu, Hawai'i

Monk Seal reintroduction in Israel

I am currently conducting a feasibility survey about the idea of reintroducing Mediterranean monk seals to Israel.

The idea is to construct a sheltered habituation enclosure, and to keep a breeding core until its population size will be large enough to support reintroduction.

I know that the Antibes Marineland project was rejected, but the Israeli concept is different.

Our purpose is currently to build a database for the authorities' "decision makers" about the feasibility of such a project.

I would like to get your professional opinion regarding this issue, or alternatively any organization or person whom I can contact, and that can give advice.

Amir Perelberg, Mammals Center, Society for Preservation of Nature in Israel.

✓ **Editor's reply:** Translocation and reintroduction of Mediterranean monk seals is a highly complex (and often contentious) issue since it necessarily involves the capture, removal and transport of individuals from existing populations elsewhere in the wild. Although an EU-funded, Spanish-led project was initiated several years ago to translocate monk seals from the Western Sahara to the Canary Islands, it never moved past the planning and research stage. Scientific opinion was divided on the wisdom and likely success of the initiative; it was hampered by lack of transparency, and the 1997 mass mortality event in the Western Sahara, which claimed two thirds of the surviving population, effectively ruled out the procurement of candidate animals. In the Mediterranean, where the surviving monk seal population is severely fragmented and composed of relatively small groups of animals, procurement of candidate animals for translocation purposes is unlikely to be approved by the relevant authorities. The **UNEP/MAP** (Barcelona Convention) Action Plan for conservation of Mediterranean monk seals [available for download in the [Monachus Library](#)] recommends that governments and NGOs take measures to encourage natural recolonisation of

former habitat, by instituting a range of *in situ* conservation measures. Such efforts are being attempted, at least in part, in southern Italy. Indeed, *in situ* conservation of this critically endangered species remains the overriding priority according to a consensus of scientific opinion [see **Johnson, William M., and David M. Lavigne**. 1998. The Mediterranean Monk Seal – Conservation Guidelines, available for download in the [Monachus Library](#)]. These efforts are mainly focused on the establishment of marine protected areas, rescue and rehabilitation, education and public awareness.

Although it is said that the Israeli concept differs from the rejected Antibes Marineland captive breeding scheme [see **Johnson, William M., and David M. Lavigne**. 1994. Captive Breeding and the Mediterranean Monk Seal – A Focus on Antibes Marineland, available in the [Monachus Library](#)], the nature of translocation dictates that there must be some shared similarities and problems, not least of all the procurement of candidate animals, the risks to the donor population, and risks to individuals in capture, transportation and captivity.

Life cycle

I came across your web site and was really moved by the articles. My 11 year old daughter is doing a report about the monk seal. And your site is very helpful for that and she has learned a great deal on the monk seal. We are looking for some real good photos of the seal through its stages of life. And, not having very good luck, we were wondering if you know where we could find such pictures. Any information would be helpful.

Melissa & Selissa French

✓ **Editor's note:** We are currently unaware of any photographic illustration of the monk seal life cycle that is easily accessible. However, we are hoping to add drawings depicting some of these stages to the Monachus Profiles section of the site in due course. In the meantime, one of our previously published articles may help: [A field method for age estimation of Mediterranean monk seal pups](#), TMG 3 (2): November 2000].

Misleading monachus

Today, I tried searching for "monachus", and then for "monachus guardian", using Google. Both turned up monachus.org first. A chance visitor might actually think that the Guardian hasn't been updated since November 2001 (since the text reads "highlights of the current issue").

What should go there is a link to the new site, and the new issues: www.monachus-guardian.org.

Another solution would be to kill the old site, and keep the domain name. If IFAW can't afford to support The Monachus Guardian any longer, at least visitors shouldn't be misled into thinking it's in limbo, resting at November 2001 indefinitely.

Stefan Lang, Public Relations Dept., University of Bern, Switzerland.

Is IFAW still going to use monachus.org to keep the back issues of TMG online? If so, can't they at least put a notice somewhere that future issues will be published at the new site, www.monachus-guardian.org?

Harun Güçlüsoy, Underwater Research Society – Mediterranean Seal Research Group (SAD-AFAG), Foça, Turkey.

✓ **Editor's note:** IFAW has given us its assurance that monachus.org will link in to the new home of The Monachus Guardian, www.monachus-guardian.org. In the meantime, we apologise to readers for any inconvenience they may have encountered.

In terms of Internet search engines, it took the founders of TMG several years to achieve monachus.org's top rankings, making it all the more unfortunate that the URL was not transferred with the journal when IFAW withdrew its formerly generous funding support.

With new issues being published at regular intervals at the substitute URL, however, www.monachus-guardian.org continues its steady climb in the search rankings, and is already within striking distance of the number 1 slot on leading engines like Yahoo. Users entering "monk

seal 2002" in search engines like Google – a recommendable tip for many Internet searches when the object is to find the latest updates – will already discover TMG's newest issues at the top of the listings.

Damaged issues

In your net site (a nice one!), it is unfortunately impossible to open the files in "current and back issues" section. The computer said that the files are damaged. Could you help me? Thanks for your help.

Marie-Odile Beudels, Institut royal des Sciences naturelles de Belgique, Brussels.

✓ **Editor's note:** The entire contents of our former site, monachus.org, was transferred to our current domain, www.monachus-guardian.org at the beginning of this year. According to several correspondents, it appears that some files in the old Monachus Library, including some back issues of The Monachus Guardian, may have been corrupted, either preventing download or subsequent file access. However, the Library is available in its entirety, and bug-free, at its new location, where many new titles have also been added since May, including PDF versions of the 2002 issues of TMG: www.monachus-guardian.org/library.htm.

Extinction scenarios

I am a freshman at the University of Puget Sound. I was wondering if there have been any hypotheses made about how the extinction of the Hawaiian monk seal would affect the Hawaiian Islands ecosystems? It is for my final project in my Diversity of Life class. Thanks so much!

Kate Pipal, University of Puget Sound, Washington, USA.

✓ **Editor's note:** Asked for his input on this topic, Dr. Jason Baker of the NMFS Hawaiian Monk Seal Population Assessment Program responded that: "This is a good question, but I don't think anyone has formally examined it with regard to monk seals. In general ecology texts, however, one can find discussion (with related references) of 'top-down' systems wherein top predators have a strong affect on other species. Whether this applies to the Hawaiian monk seal is unclear."

Keep on publishing (2)

Once again it was great to read the news and articles of "our" irreplaceable Monachus Guardian... Thank you once again for such a... creature!

Luigi Guarrera, Gruppo Foca Monaca, Roma, Italy.

So glad to see you have been resurrected! You provide an excellent service and I hope it continues.

Philip Miller, Ph.D., Program Officer, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (SSC / IUCN), Apple Valley, USA.

✓ **Editor's note:** Reaching at least 10,000 people per issue, The Monachus Guardian is the world's only dedicated source of news and information on monk seals, their shrinking habitat, and the forces threatening their survival. We take this opportunity of thanking once again the hundreds of readers who have written in to support the continued publication of TMG and the maintenance of this website [see [Keep on publishing](#), TMG 5 (1): May 2002]. It is in no small measure due to that demonstration of public, NGO, academic and media support that we have been able to continue publishing this year, aided by the generous sponsorship of the Bellerive Foundation and WWF [see [International News](#), this issue].

With Bellerive's support, we are continuing our search for alternative funding sources that will hopefully put TMG on a more secure, longer-term financial footing. Anyone able to offer advice in this respect is kindly requested to write to us at: editor@monachus-guardian.org.

Spot the Error

"Jean Hermann's drawing of *Monachus monachus*, the Mediterranean monk seal, which he originally christened *Phoca monachus* in 1779, when he described it from a skeleton. The skeleton can still be seen in the Musée Zoologique de Strasbourg, which Hermann founded."

Stears, B.P. & Stearns S.C. 1999. *Monachus monachus*, in retreat. *In*: Watching, from the edge of extinction. Yale University Press, New Haven & London: 97-115.

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

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