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International News

Funding crisis strikes Turkish, Greek and international efforts

Funding cutbacks continue to disrupt vital monk seal conservation activities in Greece, Turkey and elsewhere.

In its latest member newsletter, Greek monk seal NGO [MOM](#), announced that its 15th year had been “marked by severe financial constraints”, mainly due to the failure of the government to honour its previously agreed commitments [see also [Government inaction jeopardises marine park](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002].

The funding crisis disrupted guarding in protected areas, public awareness and education activities. Severe cutbacks, including staff redundancies, were required in order to salvage planned conservation efforts during the year, reported MOM.

Similar problems persist in Turkey, where the lone patrol boat of the flagship Foça Specially Protected Area was out of action for six months between October 2002 and April 2003 – for want of some €4000 (\$4500) to meet repair and maintenance costs.

The economic crisis in Turkey has made an already difficult predicament for grassroots conservationists even worse, reports Harun Güçlüsoy of the [Mediterranean Seal Research Group](#) in Foça, jeopardising efforts to establish a network of marine protected areas that may be the species’ only hope of survival in the area [see [MPA problem-solving](#), TMG 5 (2): November 2002].

“Unfortunately,” writes Harun, “due to the poor state of the economy in Turkey, the relevant government offices are unable to allocate the required funds for monk seal conservation issues, with the result that there are still no management plans or management authorities for our coastal Specially Protected Areas. Even basic guarding against illegal activities along our coasts can hardly be carried out by the government agencies responsible. We are trying our best to fill in the gaps where we can, alerting the authorities whenever we encounter illegal building, fishing or other activities, but without adequate funding it is an uphill battle for us as well.”

On the international front, recent events have also taken their toll upon The Monachus Guardian. With Bellerive’s help, we continue to seek funds for the ongoing publication of TMG, encouraged by the overwhelming show of support we have received from readers and contributors in countries and regions as far afield as Turkey and Hawaii, Greece and Mauritania [see Letters to the Editor, TMGs *passim*].

We, like they, need no convincing that TMG is also an integral part of the international monk seal conservation process. Indeed, it is perhaps a matter of some topical significance that when the delegates of the Rhodes conference drew up their action plan for the species 25 years ago, they specifically recommended the publication of an international newsletter to act as an “Information exchange on the conservation of monk seals...”

Similar recommendations appear in the Action Plan for the Management of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, coordinated by UNEP under the terms of the Barcelona Convention.

That each issue of The Monachus Guardian today reaches at least 10,000 people is a clear indication that such objectives are being fulfilled.

Because of recent events, this, the 11th issue of TMG, has been produced largely on a voluntary basis – an effort that unfortunately cannot be sustained.

Although it will not cease publication entirely, the contents of The Monachus Guardian will have to be drastically curtailed as of the November 2003 issue unless adequate funding can be found.

If you would like to support the continued publication of The Monachus Guardian and/or support monk seal conservation activities in Greece and Turkey, please check out our updated [Seal Appeal](#) page.

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.

Through its ongoing collaboration with the Bellerive Foundation, The Monachus Guardian is accepting donations and voluntary subscriptions from its readers.



Please turn to our [Seal Appeal](#) page for further details.

Rhodes 25th

Perhaps somewhat implausibly for those who were there at the time, 25 years have now passed since the First International Conference on the Mediterranean Monk Seal convened on the Aegean island of Rhodes in May 1978. Although words commemorating this particular anniversary may have been few and far between, Rhodes remains a landmark event in the conservation of Europe's most endangered marine mammal.

The gathering, that attracted some 60 participants from over 20 countries, was sponsored by three Greek government ministries, the United Nations Environment Program, the University of Guelph in Canada, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Arguably, such institutional support was a reflection not only of the tireless efforts of co-convenors Keith Ronald and Raymond Duguay to stage the conference, but of official recognition that something had to be done to halt the seal's precarious slide towards extinction.

By the end of the meeting, the Rhodes delegates had endorsed a detailed and coherent plan of action, listing the priorities required to save *Monachus monachus*. Addressing such issues as legislation, establishment of MPAs, scientific research and education, many of them remain as pertinent today as they did in May 1978.

In this year's November issue, we hope to publish an implementation assessment of various monk seal conservation action plans recommended or officially endorsed since Rhodes. Readers with advice or views to impart are kindly asked to contact Alexandros Karamanlidis [alkar@bio.auth.gr] and William M. Johnson [editor@monachus-guardian.org].

Further reading:

Ronald, K., and R. Duguay (eds.). 1979. The Mediterranean monk seal. First international conference on the Mediterranean monk seal, Rhodes, Greece, 2-5 May, 1978. United Nations Environment Programme / Pergamon Press, Oxford, UK: 1-183.

Golden Web Award for TMG



The Monachus Guardian has received a 2003-2004 Golden Web Award following a review of the site by the International Association of Web Masters & Designers. All candidate sites for the award are voted on by Association members, according to IAWMD rules.

EndQuote

“Historians in the future will remember the end of the 20th century for a revolutionary idea, as important as the Copernican notion 500 years ago that the Earth revolved around the sun. Nature not man is the centre of existence. Everywhere today nature is massively and continuously abused and degraded. Thousands of endangered, vulnerable and threatened species have been recorded and every day species disappear, some before they have even been named. To make this last truth more graphic, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) has chosen 12 species which are most endangered. One of these is the Mediterranean monk seal, in many ways a totemic like symbol for the good side of the human species.”

– Sadruddin Aga Khan. 1992. The Sad Tale of the Monk Seal, Bellerive Network News 1 (2): 1-2.