

Promote the protection of Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) in Albanian coastal regions

Conservation Importance

Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is the most endangered species worldwide and is currently on the brink of extinction. Using the IUCN guidelines it is considered as Endangered species. Although formerly found all over the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and northwest African coast, the species' numbers have now been reduced to perhaps less than 600. For most of the twentieth century, numbers continued to decline mostly as a consequence of human invasion of habitat and adverse fishing interactions. The number of mature individuals in the eastern Mediterranean (the largest subpopulation) is likely fewer than 250, and 100-200 occurring in the other known subpopulations. The remaining seals are found in remote and undisturbed areas around the north-east Mediterranean Sea (Greece and Turkey) and northwest African coast (Mauritania), with a few individuals along the Mediterranean coast of Morocco and the Portuguese Desertas Islands of Madeira (Johnson et al., 2006). It has been seen in the peninsula of Karaburun and in the island of Sazan in the south of Albania, as well as in the Ionian Sea between the town of Sarande and Corfu Island of Greece.

Objectives of the project

The present situation constitutes an emergency the sensitizing, monitoring and protection of this species, which is in a critical condition of extinction. Considering the fact that there has never been a study or a project made on this species, the assessment of both possible habitats is rather important to forerun the illegal hunting and damage of the habitats and the rocky caves where it proliferates. Together with the directory of protected areas in Vlore, we have realized advanced meetings and we have been initiated by them to ask for funds for the beginning of monitoring and protection projects on this species with high biological, touristic and cultural values.

1. Increasing public awareness of monk seal conservation in Ionian Coastal Areas
2. Sensitizing the fishermen and their organizations for the significance and the values of this endangered species.
3. Establish a monitoring system of monk seals, by activating students and young fishermen to photograph and record in cases of the exposal of this species.

Sensitizing workshop with the fishermen in Vlore and Himare

Make the fishermen and their organizations aware about the significance of species.

- Workshops will be organized with the fishermen from Vlore and Himare.
- Round table meetings will be held in order to get their opinion and suggestions.

Monitoring the Coastal areas

Monitoring cameras installation and check around key points of Albanian coasts.

Practical training the groups of young people for using and monitoring monk seal.

- The training the trainers approach will be used during
- Training of the young student from University of Vlore and Agricultural University of Tirana, involved fishermen.

Create an Agreement of Alliance for the Protection of Mediterranean monk seal

Realize several meetings with the local organizations of Vlore and the prefecture for

- Raising the awareness and
- Creation of an alliance entitled "Protect the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)".



Photos made by Assoc. prof. Rigers Bakiu (2016)



Photos from the IUCN website; From Management Plan for National Marine Park Karaburun-Sazani (2016) it emerged that Mediterranean Monc Seal is one of the charismatic species.

