

## **Conservation of Mediterranean Monk Seal in Turkey. Legal status and national, international linkages to establish special conservation measures**

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### **Abstract**

The Mediterranean monk seal, *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779), is the world's most endangered species of pinnipeds. The population, with only 400-600 animals remaining, may be the only population with a high risk of extinction within the next 60 years. Approximately 30-50 animals are sparsely distributed throughout the Mediterranean and Aegean coast of Turkey. The species is listed in numerous international conventions (Bonn, Bern, Barcelona, Biodiversity, IUCN Red List, Annex II of EEC-Regulations 3626/82). Monk seals have been legally protected in Turkey since 1977 and hunting and captures are prohibited. The reasons why this species approaches extinction are not different than the reasons turning the Mediterranean into a concrete edged, green, arid, artificial lake. The whole coast is occupied by man, precious marine resources are misused and depleted, blue waters are polluted. In Turkey, another group who shares the same fate with the seals, is the small-scale artisanal fishermen. Many of the traditional fishing boats of the Mediterranean were evolved to industrial trawlers or seiners. The remaining group which could not keep up the pace of technologic development, lost their function in the fishing fleet and their share from the total yield is negligible. Furthermore due to limited, depleted resources, these two counterparts, seals and small scale fishermen, were confronted. Decline in the food sources of the monk seal led them to attack fishing nets. During their attacks to steal fish from the fishing gear, they cause significant damages in the nets. The fishermen, who already suffer from ever increasing operation cost, such as fuel, engine spare parts, maintenance expenses, started to consider seals as pests to exterminate utterly. Therefore, deliberate killings were until recently the major cause of mortality. The integration of monk seal protection in fisheries policies is urgently needed. This work comparatively summarizes conservation activities carried out in two different sites of Turkey, Cilician Basin and Foca. Major emphasis has been given to contribution of local people and fishermen to the protection of this species. Additionally, an attempt is made to review existing and future conservation measures by effective national and international coordination. Recommendations are given to improve fragmentary national and international approaches to monk seal conservation.

**Key words:** Monk Seal, Mediterranean, Conservation measures...