

CONSERVATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL IN TURKEY

– Central Aegean and Cilician Basin Projects –

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Abstract of Poster

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The first protection attempts of Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus* in Turkey date back to the late 70's, when hunting and catching of the monk seal by any means was banned with the Annual Decision of the Central Commission of Hunting in 1977 and the Annual Water-products Circular in 1978. These decisions are renewed every year.

In 1991, as a result of a wide based meeting the "National Strategy for the Conservation of the Mediterranean Seal in Turkey" has been declared and a "National Monk Seal Committee" has been established. The National Committee is coordinated by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and participated by the representatives of related governmental, non-governmental organizations and academics in Turkey. The major objective of the committee is to evaluate the status of the species in the country, develop, put forward and coordinate conservation strategies for the species. As the first initiative of the committee, a small town on the Aegean coast of Turkey, which is known to host a seal population was selected as a pilot region in 1992. All kinds of mechanical fishing methods have been banned within the Foça area. Turkey's first seal and marine conservation project, the Foça Pilot Project has been initiated in Foça in 1993 with the financial support of 'WWF International'. Foça Pilot Project has been prepared, started and executed by SAD - AFAG (Underwater Research Society - Mediterranean Seal Research Group) in close cooperation with the Local Monk Seal Committee of Foça and national and local authorities. Today the Foça Pilot Project has fulfilled its mission as a "pilot" initiative and developed into a Central Aegean Project.

Turkey's second seal conservation project was launched in 1995 in the Cilician Basin, which is the strait between the Turkish mainland and Cyprus island. The first objective of this new project was to determine and map the most important monk seal habitats on the central Mediterranean coast of Turkey.

Today, both projects serve to increase the awareness of both, the locals and the Turkish people for the conservation of the endangered Mediterranean seal. Large scale fishery has been totally banned and a core seal protection area has been declared in Foça. The most important areas in the Cilician Basin, totaling some 70 km of coast line have been declared as 1st Degree Natural Sites by the Turkish Ministry of Culture. As a consequence of conservation endeavors at the project sites, seal sightings by the project team as well as locals have increased remarkably. Since 1993, 25 seals have been identified and 9 pups have been born in Foça and the Cilician regions.

In the future the project aims to disseminate experiences gained throughout the years to the other problematic but important seal habitats along the Turkish coasts.