

Status

The Mediterranean monk seal is one of the world's most endangered marine mammals, with fewer than 600 individuals currently surviving. It is believed to be the world's rarest pinniped species.

History and exploitation

Due to their trusting nature, monk seals were easy prey for fishermen using clubs, spears and nets. Monk seals were hunted for basic necessities of human survival – fur, oil, meat, medicines.

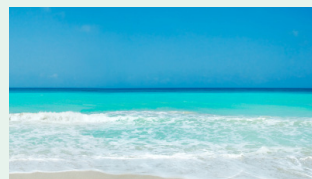
Distribution

Previously, the Mediterranean monk seal was found throughout the Mediterranean, the Marmara, the Black Sea, the Atlantic coast of Africa, and the Atlantic Islands. The previous distribution was continuous while the present distribution is discontinuous, with little exchange between the separated populations of Northeastern Mediterranean Sea, northwestern coast of Africa, and Madeira.



Habitat

Monk seals used to inhabit open sandy and rocky beaches in ancient times. Currently, they seek refuge in marginal habitats: inaccessible caves along remote cliff bound coasts. This relatively recent adaptation is a response to human pressures.



PREVIOUSLY



CURRENTLY

Lifespan

Individuals live up to 20 - 30 years in the wild.

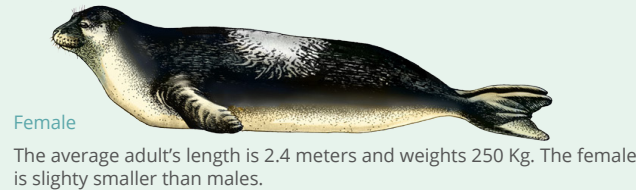
Description

Adult males are black with a white belly patch while adult females are generally grey with a lighter belly coloration. Adults reach sexual maturity at the age of 5, although some females may mature as early as 4 years.

Pups are born in a woolly blackish coat, sometimes with irregular white spots, and often with a yellowish patch below. They can swim and dive with ease by the time they are about two weeks old and are weaned at about 16-17 weeks.



Male



Female



Pup

When born, pups measure around 0.8 meter in length and weight 15 Kg.

Diet

Mediterranean monk seals are diurnal and feed on a large variety of fish and cephalopods such as octopus and squid. They usually eat up to 3 kg per day and swallow their food instead of chewing it.

Threats

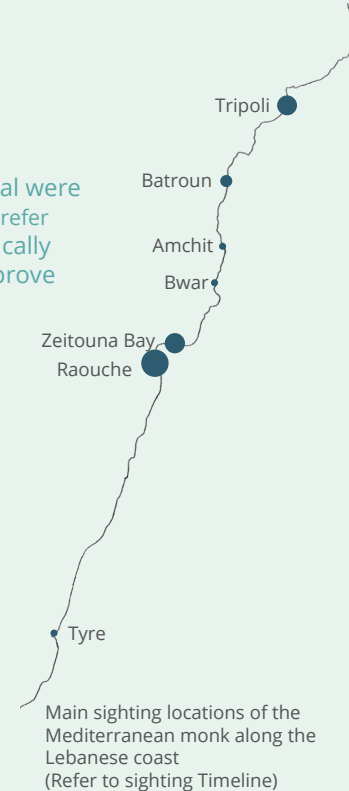
Mediterranean monk seals are particularly sensitive to human pressures and disturbance; such as: loss and deterioration of habitat by coastal development, eradication by fishermen, overfishing and pollution.

Legal protection in the Mediterranean countries

Many countries have introduced laws protecting the Mediterranean monk seal in the last 30 years but the implementation of some of these laws is not enforced. Therefore, little has changed.

Insight on Lebanon

The sightings of the monk seal were distributed all over the year (refer to sighting timeline) and specifically in the mating season which prove that the Monk Seal is not a vagrant but a rare resident. The timeline also shows a rapid decline of the Monk seal which raised the importance of taking action and safeguarding the monk seal populations through preserving their remaining habitats. This decline is due to the degradation of habitat, competition with fishermen, and lack of awareness and national plans.



SPNL & Mediterranean monk seal

One major key in this process is preserving and maintaining protected habitats to help secure the effective conservation. SPNL is engaging with fishermen and stakeholders from sighting locations such as: the Dalieh-Raouché area, Mina of Tripoli, Jbeil (Byblos) and Qoleileh to establish proper networking between them, as well as sustainable awareness on Monk Seals survival.



Picture by the lens of Mr. Imad Saidi in April 2014 next to the Sporting Area

MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL

Monachus monachus

Awarness Pamphlet



Did You Know?

To European fishermen, catching sight of the animals was considered to be an omen of good fortune.

TIMELINE OF SIGHTINGS



18
records
over 45
years

Development of a simple action plan

What should be done?

In order to focus the ideas of SPNL and to decide what steps should be taken to achieve the goal of protecting and conserving the Mediterranean monk seal, a simple Action Plan was developed:

- Agree on a draft legislation text at a national level.
- Agree on the terms of References of Humat al Hima.
- Conduct scientific research at a national level.
- Prioritize frequented sites in term of most important for breeding to least used, to become potential protected Himas.
- Find the threats and develop a strategy to reduce them.
- Produce material for increasing awareness by Humat al Hima.
- Establish data baseline as a benchmark for monitoring its population.
- Share information and expertize with countries in possession of monk seals, such as Cyprus, Greece, Mauritania and Turkey.
- Establish monitoring plots and indicators based on research findings.
- Use all available opportunities to conserve the monk seal and its habitat.
- Develop National Contingency Plan for Monk Seal emergencies and to swiftly protect its habitats from oil slicks.



Who should be targeted?

To be effective, the awareness strategy should be targeting the society principally at two different levels: local and national. Actions at these levels should be coordinated, to be mutually reinforcing. At the local level, the citizens and the fishermen of the sensitive areas should be highly informed of the conservations methods. On the other hand, students, teachers and tourists should be targeted on the national level. Concerned ministers and NGOs should also be targeted as they can expand the awareness campaign.