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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

**Follow-up of Closed file No. 2011/4:
Threat to the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus
monachus*) in Turkey**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Turkey*

GOVERNMENT REPORT (2018) FOR THE FOLLOW-UP OF CLOSED FILE NO. 2011/4: THREAT TO THE MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL (*MONACHUS MONACHUS*) IN TURKEY

The Yeşilovacık Harbor Project, consisting of building a filling area and construction of a port, is pursued by Yeşilovacık Harbor Enterprises Inc. The Environmental Impact Assessment of this construction was completed in 2008 and the construction of the port was completed in 2015. Based on an “ecosystem evaluation report” prepared by three professors from Ankara University as a part of Environmental Impact Assessment, it had been committed by the company that the Mediterranean Monk Seal population would be monitored. According to this commitment, the construction company is obliged to finance the monitoring activities of the Monk Seal. Within this scope, academic staff from Ankara University is monitoring the area and they present reports to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Besides, monitoring studies are held concurrently within the scope of monk seal action plan prepared by the former Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. These monitoring studies are carried out together with Middle East Technical University, Institute of Marine Sciences.

Monitoring Studies Within the Scope of Harbor Construction:

The harbor company was obliged to carry out monitoring work based on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. According to the commitment, the Mediterranean Monk Seal population has to be monitored by expert people from universities and being financed by the company. Within this scope, academic staff from Ankara University is monitoring the area continuously.

“Balıklı Cave”, which is a breeding site for *Monachus monachus*, is located about approximately 600 m away from the piled jetty system at the tip of the harbor. A full-time biologist and an aquaculture engineer is employed to monitor the effects of construction activities. They present their reports to the Mersin Branch of Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. Mersin Branch is evaluating the reports and make their inspection based on the information provided by those reports. These detailed reports are then presented to the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks based in Ankara.

After the last report which was presented to the committee in 2016, there are six other mid-term reports presented to the authorities. The monitoring of harbor activities is still continuing in the coordination of Mersin Branch of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. A short report about all the monk seal sightings could be found in Appendix 1.

Implementations of Monk Seal Conservation Action Plan

As it was presented in previous reports, one of the activities in the action plan is to determine the habitats of monk seal within the marine and coastal ecosystems of Mersin province and to put forward the population sizes and monitor them. A protocol with the concept “Monitoring of Monk Seal Populations and Habitats” had been signed between Middle East Technical University Institution of Marine Sciences and Mersin Branch of the Ministry in 2015. This protocol, which was renewed in 2018, targets protecting the monk seal habitats and carrying them to future generations. The methods of monitoring monk seals was taught to Mersin Branch personnel by the University staff. The report produced at the end of the studies within the scope of the protocol is presented in Appendix 2. Other activities of the action plan carried out in 2018 is presented in Appendix 3.

A comprehensive analysis report will be produced at the end of the 5 year implementation period of the action plan. For the current date, monitoring and conservation studies are still being carried out.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Monk seal sightings
- Appendix 2: Update on monk seal cave survey results
- Appendix 3: Implementation of monk seal action plan

Appendix I

MONK SEAL SIGHTINGS AROUND THE HARBOUR

The transportation activities at the Harbor of Yesilovacik in Silifke, Mersin continued in 2017 and 2018. The monitoring of monk seals around the harbor is done by Prof. Dr. Nuri YİĞİT, Prof. Dr. Ercüment ÇOLAK of Ankara University and Biologist Hatice Yuksel who is employed in the responsible company, under the supervision of Mersin Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Yesilovacik port and its fill site have been monitored by cameras at 6 different observation points 7/24 since 2014. An agriculture engineer is full-time employed and he is visiting observation points and shore habitats and taking records for all the observations he is making. The closest monk seal cave to the port is “Balıklı cave” which is approximately 600 metres from the port. A camera system was installed at the port, against the Balıklı Cave, to be able to monitor the cave live and online. Besides, an additional camera was installed to be able to check the sides and end of the port together, and these two cameras are taking records online. By these cameras, the monk seal activity is being monitored all the time. Monk seals are recorded rarely while foraging under or near the port. Besides, regular interviews with the fishermen around the port is made and the data obtained are added to the report. The reports are prepared by the scientists and evaluated by the ministerial staff. Inspections are made by the staff of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. During the inspections, no environmental pollution was recorded in and around harbour area. Besides, some species were recorded which settled on the pillars of the harbour. These species include but not limited to, *Chthamalus stellatus*, *Patella caerulea*, *Phorcus turbinatus*, *Brachidontes pharaonis* and *Actinia equina*, which resulted in the occurrence of pelagic fish and sea turtles around the harbour area. Monk seal sightings are recorded in a table, which is given below;

Observation Point	Location	Day	Hour	Sex	Record Type
OP-2	Yesilovacik	30.12.2012 ^F	16 ⁴⁹	Female	Photograph
OP-2	Yesilovacik	20.01.2013 ^F	11 ²⁸	Female	Photograph
OP-2	Yesilovacik	24.02.2013 ^F	12 ¹²	?-Young	Photograph and Video
OP-4	Yesilovacik	20.12.2013 ^F	16 ⁰⁰	?-Young	Photograph
OP-1	Yesilovacik	16.02.2014 ^F	09 ³⁴	?-Young	Photograph and Video
OP-1	Yesilovacik	17.02.2014 ^F	14 ¹⁵	?-Young	Photograph
OP-5	Yesilovacik	01.05.2014	11 ²⁵	Male	Photograph
OP-1	Yesilovacik	03.02.2015	14 ³¹	Male	Photograph
OP-1	Yesilovacik	10.03.2015	17 ³⁰	Male	Photograph and Video
Fishing port	Yesilovacik	13.03.2015	11 ⁰⁰	Female	Photograph and Video
Fishing port	Yesilovacik	16.04.2015	20 ¹⁵	?-Long distance	Photograph and Video
Dolphin (Companion)	Yesilovacik	29.04.2015	10 ⁰³	?-Long distance	Video

OP-1	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	28.01.2016	16 ⁰⁵	Female	Report
OP-1 Harbor Fill Site	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	12.02.2016	21 ³⁰	Male	Video
OP-1 Harbor Fill Site	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	16.02.2016	17 ³⁴	Male	Photograph and Video
Fishing port	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	27.09.2016	17 ⁰⁵	Male	Photograph
Dolfen (Port end)	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	22.01.2017	00 ¹³	Male	Video
OP-1 Sub-Port	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	28.02.2017	22 ⁴⁵	Male	
Port North Entrance	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	02.12.2017	10: ⁵⁰	Male	Photograph
OP-2	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	11.12.2017	11: ⁴²	Male	Video
Fire Depot Gate	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	19.12.2017	20: ⁵²	Male	Video
Port Entrance North-3	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	22.12.2017	21: ¹²	?	Video
Port Dolfen	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	10.01.2018	00: ²⁵	Male	Photograph
Port No:1	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	08.02.2018	01: ⁵⁵	?	Video
Tisan	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	20.05.2018	18: ³⁰	Male	Photograph
Fishing port	<u>Yeşilovacık</u>	06.06.2018	20: ²⁰	?	Video

Appendix II

UPDATE ON MONK SEAL CAVE SURVEY RESULTS Report of Monitoring Project Between METU-IMS and MOAFW Mersin Branch

PROJECT PURPOSE:

To determine the monk seal habitats in Mersin Province and to develop a better strategy to protect monk seals in Mersin.

The protocol which was signed between METU-IMS and MoAF Mersin Branch to monitor the monk seals was renewed in 2018.

MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCES PROJECT TEAM

Institute Director Assoc. Prof. Dr. Barış SALİHOĞLU
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Veterinarian Dr. Ayşe DÜRGEN
Biologist Orhan KARAKAYA

INSTALLATION OF PHOTOTRAPS

Monk seals' biology, ecology and morphology was taken into account while installing the phototrap. The installation angle and distance is important in order to get clear photos of monk seals. The phototrap were mounted to the walls of caves by using special equipments in this study

As the monk seals are photographed inside the caves, the angle of sun was not important while installing the phototrap. The GPS coordinates of caves were taken after the installation.

All the caves were listed and grouped according to their characteristics, size, weather conditions, geography etc. Then a field study program was arranged and caves were prioritized.

CAVE MONITORING STUDIES IN 2017 and 2018											
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

■ Installation, card control and general site visits

METHOD USED TO MONITOR MONK SEALS

Monk seal is a very vulnerable species and it is very sensitive to noise. Thus female monk seals choose very secure and silent caves to give birth and to feed the young. These caves are located on the untouched coasts of the mainland and the islands.

To detect the caves where monk seal lives in, the coastal ecosystems were visited through the land and the sea. When a cave was spotted, the phototraps were installed into it. Then every 1,5 or 2 months, phototraps were checked both for battery charge and for memory cards. The data obtained was transferred to computers and all the caves were named to prevent disorder. All the data is stored in computers for further analysis which will be done at the end of the study. Besides, the sandy beaches were scanned during the field work to see any small pockets.

The following table was prepared after the field work, to show which cave is installed with phototraps.

CAVES MONITORED WITHIN THE SCOPE OF MONK SEAL (*M. monachus*) MONITORING PROJECT

NO	DISTRICT	LOCATION	CAVE NAME	MONITORING PERIOD	COORDINATE (UTM 6 ° - ED50- 36 S)		NUMBER OF PHOTOTRAPS IN THE CAVE	NOTE
					X	Y		
1	Silifke	Akkum	Party	2016-2018	601...	4034...	2	F
2	Silifke	Kargıcak (Dana Adası Karşısı)	Fokini	2016-2018	568...	4008...	1	F+E
3	Silifke	Yeşilovacık	Balıklı	2016-2018	559...	4003...	3	E
4	Gülnar	Beşparmak Adası	Beşparmak	2016-2018	547...	3998...	1	F
5	Aydıncık	Aydıncık	Soğuksu	2016-2018	533...	3999...	1	F
6	Bozyazı	Kızıllıman	Böz	2016-2018	508...	3994...	2	D+J
7	Anamur	Anamur-Melleç Arası	Çöplük	2016-2018	478...	3987...	1	D
8	Anamur	Melleç	İkikapılı	2016-2018	474...	3988...	1	
9	Anamur	Melleç	Piramit	2016-2018	474...	3988...	1	J
10	Gazipasa	Kaledran-Antalya	Yarasalı	2016-2018	458...	3994...	2	T
11	Aydıncık	Yeni Kaş	Charlie	2016-2018	524...	3996...	2	D+F

D = Female Monk Seal

E = Male Monk Seal

J = Juvenile Monk Seal

F = Feces

T = Track

PHOTOS OBTAINED DURING THE MONITORING OF CAVES

Monitoring of Party cave:

Two phototrap were installed into this cave in 2016. Monitoring is still continuing.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project.

Monitoring of Fokini cave:

This cave was intalled with 1 photo in 2016. The monitoring is still continuing.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project

Monitoring of Balikli cave

This cave was installed with 3 phototrap. 2 of them became disfunctional due to salty water. Monitoring study is carried out by 1 phototrap.

Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project



Monitoring of Beşparmak cave

Monitoring studies are continuing with 1 phototrap.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project.

Monitoring of Soğuksu cave

Monitoring study is still carried out with 1 phototrap. Additionally, 1 female with a young monk seal was observed outside this cave. Monitoring studies are continuing.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project.

Monitoring of Böz cave:

Monitoring studies are continuing with 2 phototraps.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project.

Monitoring of Çöplük cave:

This cave is monitored with 1 phototrap.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project.

Monitoring İkikapili cave:

This cave was being monitored by 1 phototrap, however the phototrap was found to be dysfunctional at the end of 2016. Monitoring studies cannot continue at this cave. İzleme çalışmaları devam etmektedir.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project

Monitoring Piramit cave:

There is one phototrap installed in Piramit cave and monitoring is continuing.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project

Monitoring Kaledran-Yarasali cave:

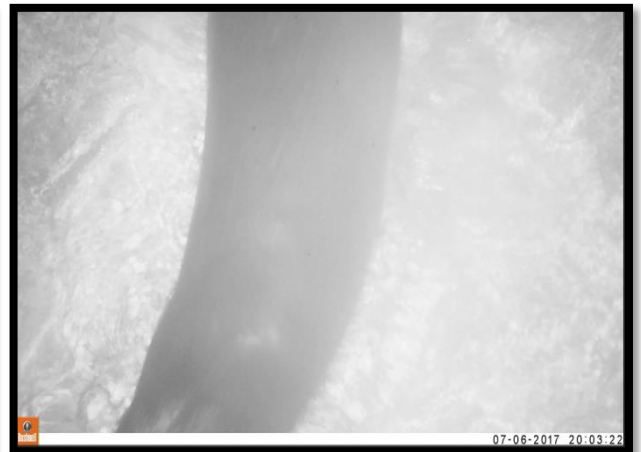
2 phototraps have been used in Yarasali cave, in which monitoring still continues. However, phototraps were broken by the salty water.



Monk seal activity pattern for this cave will be obtained at the end of the project

Monitoring Charlie cave:

This cave was installed with 1 phototrap in 2017. The monitoring studies are continuing.



Out of cave sightings during monitoring

During the monitoring study, monk seals were observed usually in the sea around the seal caves or in some small pockets while nursing their youngs. Especially two females nursing two youngs in the same pocket is a remarkable behaviour. One of these females is detected outside Böz cave. Besides, an encounter with a monk seal outside Fokini cave was recorded by video shot.





Monitoring of monk seals within the scope of the protocol and Monk Seal Action Plan has been continuing in 11 monk seal caves. Additional 6 caves are planned to be monitored but the project experts decided not to install phototraps into these caves due to the inappropriate nature of caves.

General evaluation on monitoring

In 2016 – 2017 season, two monk seals were born. In addition, two were born in 2017-2018 season. In total, 19 monk seals were detected in Mersin province during 2017 -2018. One of the newborns in 2017 was found dead. Number of newborns is low when compared with the previous year. The reason for low number could be because of increasing human activities around the region.

As the project goes on for one more year, general evaluation will be made after the project is completed.

Some of the phototraps were broken because of penetration of salty water inside them. Therefore there is a need to support the caves with extra phototraps for the forthcoming year.

Appendix 3 –

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN

Number and Name of the Activity In the Plan	Current situation of implementation
<p>1.1 Cave Inventory Studies</p> <p>1.1.1 The caves which are used by monk seals will be determined and labeled on a digital map.</p> <p>1.1.2 The threats on monk seal caves will be determined.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Caves were determined and mapped. 2. This activity is still ongoing.
<p>1.2 Population Inventory Studies</p> <p>1.2.1 By using phototraps, the number of monk seals and sex and age ratios of the population will be determined.</p> <p>1.2.2 A web site and a call center will be created for monk seal observations and the notifications received will be recorded in the website. This call center will also serve for urgent situations of monk seals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This activity is still on going and will be finalized in 2019. 2. A web site was built and became operational. The existing report line (0 324 481 22 84) for sea turtle rehabilitation center has been arranged to serve for monk seals also. This new report line has been announced in hand brochures and Gendarmerie and local governments have been informed about this new line. Monk seal sightings are reported to this line.
<p>2.1 Protection of Habitats</p> <p>2.1.1 Informing stakeholders about the habitats that monk seals use.</p> <p>2.1.2 Hanging out warning and/or information signs around the important terrestrial sites close to monk seal habitats.</p> <p>2.1.3 Evaluating the existing legislation about monk seals and improving them to serve for mitigating threats to monk seal habitats.</p> <p>2.1.4 Increasing the precautions to protect the monk seal cave in Akkum locality of Silifke District.</p> <p>2.1.5 Cooperation, in general, with the stakeholders to better implement protection precautions.</p> <p>2.1.6 Making fisheries install outer protective nets for their breeding cages.</p> <p>2.1.7 To determine the acceptable distance for noise creating activities depending on the decibel level, using this guide to evaluate the planned activities that may have negative effects on monk seal habitats. Besides, for activities which do not have noise impact, evaluating the threat level of the activity through a scientific research. Allowing the activities only if the scientific reports approves them.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The stakeholders will be informed after the phototrap study is completed. 2. 15 warning signs were manufactured with the help of Erdemli Industrial High School and hanged in order to inform people in terrestrial habitats. 3. The Ministerial Manifest is still under preparation about protection of monk seal and its habitats throughout Turkish coasts of Meditarreanean, Egean and Marmara Seas. 4. Related institutions were informed about the protection of monk seal and monk seal caves. 5. Exchange of views, with all the stakeholders and particularly with Mersin University and METU Marine Sciences Institution is made throughout the year to better implement the action plan. 6. This issue is followed by local branch of ministry of food, agriculture and livestock. The related ministry is pushing all the fisheries to complete the installment of outer protective nets. 7. Not much progress has been made. Investing activities are still evaluated based on the map for monk seal habitats, which is an appendix of the action plan.

<p>2.1.8 To determine, in order to protect the monk seals, the route that yachts will use when the Aydıncık Marina is completed, as it is as close as 2 km to the monk seal cave in the region.</p>	<p>8. The yacht route is determined. The route that was produced was sent to the Anamur Harbor Department of Ministry of Transportation, Maritime and Communication with an official letter.</p>
<p>2.2 Protection of the Species 2.2.1 Creating a communication tool for both notification of dead or injured monk seals and also for increasing communication between the institutions.</p>	<p>1. The reporting line is still active on the issue.</p>
<p>3.1 Education and Awareness Raising Studies; 3.1.1 Meetings for the education and awareness raising for local people and students will be held. Brochures, posters and handouts will be prepared and distributed in the meetings. 3.1.2 Education of fishermen and fisheries personnel. 3.1.3 3.1.4 Informative meetings about the biology and ecology of monk seals and research going on about monk seals.</p>	<p>1. Educational meetings were held around the primary and secondary schools close to the monk seal habitats in 2017 and 2018. Close cooperation with the Ministry of Education was made and list of primary and secondary schools were taken from them. 2. The education program that was held with the participation of heads of fishermen cooperatives was repeated in 2017 and 2018. 3. This activity will be repeated after the completion of monitoring study.</p>
<p>4.1 Monitoring Program 4.1.1 To monitor the change in birth and death rates of monk seals. 4.1.2 To monitor the threats on monk seal habitats. 4.1.3 To monitor the newborns and determining the rate of survival.</p>	<p>1. Monitoring with phototraps is still continuing. The results will be published later. 2. By using the report line, the website and the phototraps together, the data gathered will be evaluated in the analysis of threats. 3. This activity is still in progress.</p>