

Status of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, *Monachus monachus*, in the Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area, Turkey

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Abstract. The status of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, *Monachus monachus*, has been studied over a five-year period between 1994 and 1998 in the Foça Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area. The identification of individual seals occurring in the area, their spatial distribution and biology were studied using the results of direct cave surveys, land-based seal observations, and interviews. The population of Monk Seals was estimated to consist of 9 individuals, 6 of which were adult females and 3 were juveniles (one female, one male and one of unknown sex.). Islands off Foça town provide suitable habitats and promote the survival of the species. Of the 11 caves identified, two were found to be used for reproduction.

Kurzfassung. Der Status der Mittelmeermönchsrobbe, *Monachus monachus*, wurde zwischen 1994 und 1998 in einer fünfjährigen Untersuchungsperiode im Mönchsrobberschutzgebiet von Foça untersucht. Für die individuelle Erkennung von Robben im Untersuchungsgebiet, die Untersuchung ihrer räumlichen Verteilung und ihrer Biologie wurden direkte Beobachtungen an Meeresgrotten, Beobachtungen vom Land aus sowie Befragungen durchgeführt. Die Populationsgröße wurde zu 9 Individuen ermittelt, und zwar 6 adulte Weibchen und 3 Jungtiere (ein Weibchen, ein Männchen und ein Tier mit unbekanntem Geschlecht). Auf den vor der Stadt Foça gelegenen Inselchen gibt es passende Habitate, die das Überleben der Art ermöglichen. Von den insgesamt 11 erfassten Meeresgrotten wurden zwei für die Fortpflanzung genutzt.

Key words. Aegean Sea, biology, behaviour, habitat, conservation.

Introduction

The critically endangered Monk Seal, *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) was known to occur in Foça in antiquity. During archaeological excavations, coins that depict Monk Seals dating back to 625 BC have been found in Foça, and may indicate that the seals were abundant then and were viewed as having an important economic value, or were regarded as sacred “totem” animals (JOHNSON & LAVIGNE 1999a). In recent times, the species’ occurrence at and around Foça has been reported by MURSALOĞLU (1964), BERKES et al. (1979), MARCHESSAUX (1987), SAVAŞ & KIRAC (1991), ÖZTÜRK (1992), and ÖZTÜRK & DEDE (1995). In 1991, Foça was selected as a »Pilot Monk Seal Conservation Area (PMSCA)«, where industrial fisheries, including purse-seine fishery and trawling, were banned in 1992, in order to implement the »National Strategy for the Conservation of the Monk Seal« issued by the National Monk Seal Committee of Turkey (ANONYMOUS 1991a, 1991b). In order to determine the present status of and habitat use by the local Monk Seal population, the authors lived in the town of Foça from January 1994 to December 1998.