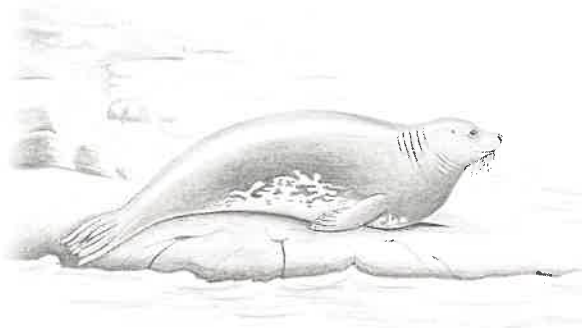


# *Monachus monachus* (HERMANN, 1779)



M. Năzăreanu

Three species of monk seals formerly existed. The Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus*, the Hawaiian monk seal *Monachus schauinslandi* and the Caribbean monk seal *Monachus tropicalis*. The latter species is believed to be extinct.

## Distribution

**World:** the Mediterranean and Black Seas, the Madeiran Archipelago and the north-west coast of Africa.

**Europe:** populations confined to the Aegean and Ionian Seas, the Desertas Islands and Ponta de São Laurenço on Madeira. Continued presence is recorded from the Adriatic Sea (Croatia and Albania), Sardinia, the Tuscan and Sicilian Islands and in the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine). Occasional records from Puglia (Italy) and offshore Italian islands.

This species was formerly widespread throughout the Mediterranean and Black Seas, the north-west coast of Africa down to the 20th parallel and Macronesia including the Azores, Canaries and Madeira. It was severely depleted and disappeared from the French mainland (1930s), Italian mainland and most of Spain (1950s), Andalusia, the Balearics and Tuscan archipelago (1960s), most of Corsica, Sicily, the Egadian Islands and Cyprus in the 1980s.

## Geographic variation

Possible separate subspecies status for the monk seals occurring in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean is currently investigated.

## Mediterranean monk seal

AL	Foka e Mesdheut	LU	-
BG	Белокоремен тюлен	LV	Mūkronis
CZ	Tuleň středomořský	MK	Медитерански монах
DE	Mönchsrobbe	MT	Monka; Bumerin
DK	Munkesæl	NL	Monniksrob
EE	Munkhüljes	NO	Middelhavsmunkesel
ES	Foca monje	PL	Mniszka
FI	Munkkihylje		śródziemnomorska
FO	-	PT	Lobo-marinho
FR	Phoque moine	RO	Foca-cu-burta-albă; Foca-episcop
GR	Μεσογειακή φώκια	RU	Тюлень-монах
HR	Sredozemna medvjedica	SE	Munksäl
HU	Mediterrán barátfóka	SI	Sredozemska medvedjica
IR	-	SK	Tuleň mnišský
IS	Munkaselur	TR	Akdeniz fokü
IT	Foca monaca	YU	Средоземна медведица
LT	-		

## Habitat

Monk seals used to haul out on sandy and rocky beaches; now they are confined to caves with the exception of a very few beaches on the Saharan coast. The caves, often with underwater entrances, have sandy or pebble beaches and are used for breeding and resting. The seals feed on benthic fish communities and invertebrates.

## Population status

The total world population is presently estimated to be 320–475 animals. Estimates for major regions of its range were: Aegean Sea (Cyprus, Greece, Libya, Turkey) 120–250, Black Sea (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey) 10, Ionian Sea (Ionian Islands – Greece) 20–35, Adriatic Sea (Croatia, Albania) 20, Central Mediterranean (Sardinia – Italy) 10, Western Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco) 20–30, Madeira 20, Sahara coast 100. The latter colony has been recently severely reduced from 300 to 100 animals.

## International legal and conservation status

Bern Convention, Appendix II.

Bonn Convention, Appendix I.

EU Habitats & Species Directive, Annex II\* & Annex IV.

IUCN Red List, Critically Endangered.

CITES, Appendix I; EC 338/97, Annex A.



### Other information

The major threat to monk seals used to be deliberate killing by fishermen. This is still considered to occur in the eastern Mediterranean. Other threats are loss of habitat, incidental entanglement and disturbance. Threats from reduction in food supply and diseases should not be ignored. Protected areas with effective control are of fundamental importance to protect this species. A mass mortality recently occurred in the colony at the Saharan coast. Since the middle of May 1997, about 110 seals have been found dead there. The observations of seals in the caves indicated that approximately one third of the world population of this species died within two months. The primary cause is not known, but there is evidence that toxins produced

by a dinoflagellate bloom and a viral infection were both involved. The impact of this die-off on the viability of the Atlantic monk seal population is currently being investigated.

### Literature

- Duguy & Marchessaux (1992)
  - King (1983)
  - Reijnders *et al.* (1993)
  - Reijnders *et al.* (1997)
  - Ridgway & Harrison (1981)
- P. J. H. Reijnders, C. Prigioni,  
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