

**Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*):**  
**Up-date of the status and conservation progress in the Atlantic populations**  
**2012-2013**

Report prepared  
by Luis Mariano González, Rosa Pires and Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa

1. The Mediterranean Monk Seal is one of the most threatened marine mammals in the world. It is classified by IUCN as Critically Endangered, with no more than 500 individuals remaining in the Mediterranean and along East Atlantic coasts. Impacts include mortality from entanglement in fishing gear, overfishing, persecution, pollution and destruction of breeding sites.

2. The MoU was signed by the four Range States and the CMS Secretariat in October 2007, and came into effect immediately. The MOU aims at providing a legal and institutional framework for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Recovery of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in the Eastern Atlantic. The CMS Secretariat provides secretariat functions. A Monk Seal Working Group composed of representatives of the four Signatory States has been operational since the inception of the Memorandum, and oversees and guides activities undertaken under the MOU and the Action Plan. The operation of the Working Group has to date been financially supported by the Government of Spain. A meeting of the Working Group is expected to be developed in the first semester of 2014.

**Actions performed or in progress in the different range countries:**

**PORTUGAL (Madeira)**

In 1988 the Parque Natural da Madeira Service implemented a long term and continuous program to conserve the monk seal in the Madeira archipelago, which follows three main lines:

- (1) The effective protection of the species and its habitat.
- (2) The monitoring of the population using non-intrusive techniques.
- (3) The environmental education and social support.

Since monk seals returned to Madeira Island and are recolonizing areas in this island, the possibility of conflict with humans increased. Interactions between monk seals and divers, tourism operators and fishermen are increasing and conservation actions need to be undertaken to minimize the consequences of these interactions. Regarding this:

- Habitat protection remains the outstanding priority for the conservation of the species. In this sense, in May 14th 2013, the Regional Government of Madeira approved a regional normative to regulate marine vertebrates observation (Decreto Legislativo Regional n.º 15/2013/M, Aprova o Regulamento da Atividade de Observação de Vertebrados Marinhos na Região Autónoma da Madeira). Thanks to this new regulation, caves that have been known to be used by monk seals can no longer entered by anyone without an special authorization from Natural Park of

Madeira. The regulation also protects monk seals from disturbances that can take place in the sea or on land, establishing limits to the interaction of humans with seals.

- Monk seal population monitoring systems are being standardized in both Atlantic populations, according to the International Action Plan for the Recovery of Mediterranean Monk Seal in the Eastern Atlantic (CMS/UNEP).
- Non invasive monitoring methods have already been successfully used during 2012 breeding season in order to monitor the main breeding nucleus of the Madeira monk seal population located in Desertas islands.
- Funding to the LIFE + UE Program has been applied by the two groups working in both Atlantic populations (Natural Park of Madeira and CBD-Habitat Foundation) in order to establish a system to monitor the conservation status of monk seals and their habitat in Madeira archipelago and to minimize consequences of negative known human interactions. This collaboration in the field of both groups is a consequence of the MoU application.
- Public awareness continues to keep an active role among Madeira main island residents.

Currently the Madeira monk seal population is estimated in 30-40 individuals and is distributed in the whole archipelago except in the island of Porto Santo.

## **SPAIN**

Spain administrations are conducting mainly coordination and funding role in the MoU execution. According to this, the main actions are:

- Coordination and implementation of the Monk Seal Recovery Plan in the Atlantic by the Spanish Ministry of Environment.
- Support to monk seal conservation projects and marine protected areas reinforcement in the African Atlantic range of the species through the Spain-UNEP Partnership for Protected Areas (LifeWeb).
- Support to monk seal conservation and social development projects in Mauritania and Morocco.
- Coordination of the next meeting of the Action Plan working group foreseen for the first semester of 2014.

## **MOROCCO**

Many conservation actions in Moroccan Atlantic coast are being performed including:

- Establishment of surveillance patrols in Special Conservation Areas for Monk Seals (SACMS) north of the Cap Blanc peninsula (Guerguerat - Vialobos - Corbeiro), to identify and mitigate disturbances and threats and propose further protection measures.
- A new permanent encampment has been installed to give support to patrols on this coastline.

- Monk seal presence has been confirmed in this coast from Cap Barbas to Guerguerat along the whole year thanks to direct observations, fishermen interviews and data provided by monk seals tagged with satellite transmitters in the Cap Blanc colony.
- Installation of photo-trap cameras in suitable habitats of the SACMs to determinate monk seal presence and caves and beaches use.
- Continuous surveillance of the Cap Blanc No-fishing area by the Moroccan Royal Navy. Satellite monitoring of adult males from the cap Blanc colony have shown that animals remain inside this protected area for most part of their time.
- Training of local artisan fishermen in responsible and sustainable fisheries.

## **MAURITANIA**

Many conservation actions are in implementation process.

- Cap Blanc monk seal breeding caves at Cap Blanc peninsula and vicinities are permanently protected to avoid human disturbances and to minimize risk of entanglement in fishing gear.
- The population is monitored to evaluate efficacy of protection measures and determinate population trends. Pup production keeps increasing, reaching 63 pups in 2012.
- Tagging of adult females and juveniles with Fastloc GPS to determinate critical habitats of the species in the area in order to evaluate established protection measures and development of new ones.
- Installation of photo-trap cameras in caves and open beaches of the Cap Blanc peninsula to determinate monk seal presence and habitat use.
- Reinforcement of marine and terrestrial surveillance of the Satellite Reserve of Cap Blanc.
- Reinforcement of information and education activities in the Satellite Reserve of Cap Blanc.

The Cabo Blanco monk seal population, inhabiting the border area between Mauritania and Morocco was estimated in 2012 in more than 220 animals. Pup production keeps its increasing trend with 63 newborns in 2012, the maximum number of pups observed in this colony.