

CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

Organization Legal Name:	Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon
Project Title:	Evaluating the status of Monk seal population in Lebanon
Date of Report:	25 January 2016
Report Author and Contact Information:	Bassima Khatib Email: bkhatib@spnl.org Tel: 00961 1 748309 Mobile: 00961 3 057716

CEPF Region: Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot

Strategic Direction: 3 – Investment Priority 3.3

Grant Amount: 4,700 \$

Project Dates: 1 October 2015 – 31 March 2016

Implementation Partners for this Project (please explain the level of involvement for each partner):

The project was managed by SPNL as the lead organization. Basic information on sightings has been collated from fishermen, divers, media & marine experts/NGOs.

Partners in the project has been Department of Environment & Natural Resources in Balamand University, fishermen association, and the diver's Syndicate who helped in collecting the baseline information on the status of the Monk seal population in Lebanon.

Further, SPNL has researched other organizations/NGOs/individuals elsewhere in the Med who work on monk seal populations and can give advice on data collection/desk research who need to be involved. Thus, drawing on recent work and expertise outside of Lebanon. These would be the basis for regional Med working group for the Monk Seal including key range states who would support in developing an action plan for monk seal conservation in Lebanon.

Conservation Impacts

Please explain/describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile.

This project relates to “Strategic Direction 3. Improve the conservation and protection status of 44 priority key biodiversity areas”; where it satisfies “Investment Priority 3.3. Raise awareness of the importance of priority key biodiversity areas, including those that have irreplaceable plant and marine biodiversity”; as this project concentrates on understanding the status of Monk Seal population and promoting the conservation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in Lebanon, which is globally threatened species at the verge of extinction (through awareness and development of simple action plan) .

This project further links to “Goal Target 3.6 which state that “Monk seal presence in Syria, Lebanon and Israel is confirmed and permanently established” in the regional strategy for the conservation of Monk Seal in the Mediterranean (2014-2019) developed by UNEP, as it would assess the status of Monk seal in Lebanon.

This project has resulted in a baseline study that confirmed the occurrence and breeding of the Mediterranean Monk Seal and the development of a simple action plan for conservation action.

Please summarize the overall results/impact of your project.

The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is a Pinniped belonging to the family Phocidae. As of 2015, it is estimated that fewer than 600 individuals survive in three or four isolated subpopulations in the Mediterranean (especially in the Aegean Sea), the archipelago of Madeira and the Cabo Blanco area in the northeastern Atlantic Ocean. It is believed to be the world's rarest pinniped species, and one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Several causes provoked a dramatic population decrease during the 20th century: eradication by fishermen, who used to consider it a pest due to the damage the seal causes to fishing nets when it preys on fish caught in them; and, on the other hand, coastal urbanization and pollution.

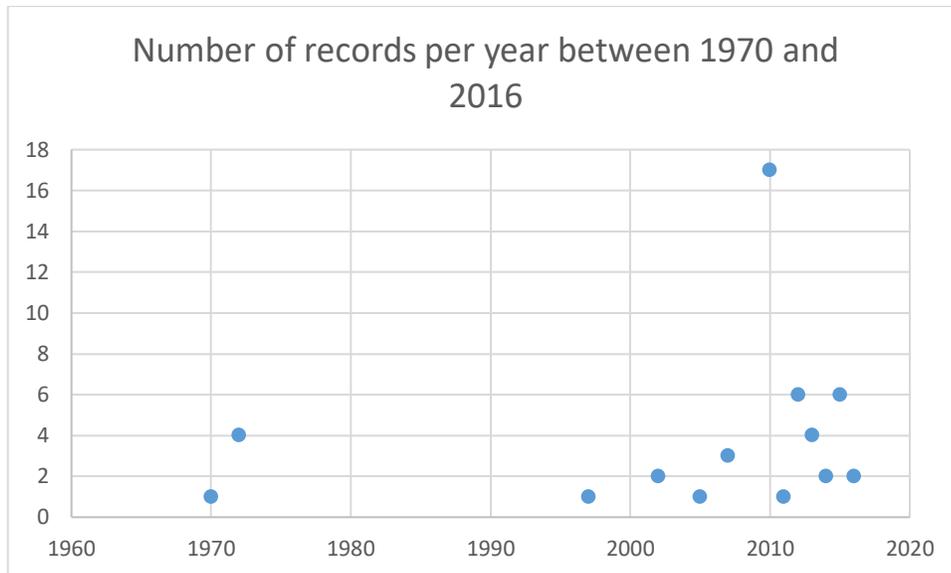
The Mediterranean Monk Seal was formerly found all over the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and northwest African coast. Whereas the former distribution was continuous throughout its range, the present distribution is discontinuous, with probably little exchange between the separated populations (Johnson et al., 2006)¹. The remaining seals are found in remote and undisturbed areas around the north-east Mediterranean Sea (Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine territory) and northwest African coast (Mauritania), with a few individuals along the Mediterranean coast of Morocco and the Portuguese Desertas Islands of Madeira (Johnson et al., 2006).

The study within this project has collected all sighting incidences for the period from 1970 – early 2016 (around 46 years) which is the first of its kind for the Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore. The highest frequency of appearance was found in Raouche (25%) and Palm Islands Nature Reserve (20%) as clarified in the below map.



¹Johnson, W.J., Karamanlidis, A.A., Dendrinou, P., Larrinoa, P.F., Gazo, M., González, L.M., Güçlüsoy, H., Pires, R. and Schnellman, M. (2006). Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). Monk seal fact files. [Monachus Guardian](#).

47 individuals were recorded during the last 20 years (1996-2015) point, in the chart below, to irregular observations and reporting with increased observation paces during the last 5 years, apparently resulting from increased awareness. This certainly reflects the need for scientific research and real monitoring. In the absence of scientific field studies, the number of the Monk seal individuals or the size of the population in Lebanon, at any time of the year, can only be guessed to be presently around 3-4 pairs in Beirut, 3 pairs in Batroun and 2 pairs in Tripoli. Furthermore, the chronological history of the Monk Seal in Lebanon suggests that its population had been declining rapidly since the 1970s, most probably due to disturbance, degradation of habitat, competition with fishermen, lack of awareness and other causes that need to be explored and identified.



It is important to note that September to May is a breeding period for Monk seals. It is a relatively sedentary species, spending most of its time within a limited range. It does not migrate long distances. The far above 28 records or so of about 40 individuals during the last 45 years point to occasional observations resulting from chance encountering, death or bycatch; and subsequently from absence of scientific research and real monitoring. The Table (1) below shows that the records were distributed almost all over the year, a matter that demonstrates the Monk Seal is not a vagrant in Lebanon but a rare resident especially that it was found during the breeding season, in addition to the finding of a pregnant female in January 2015 at Raouche area.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Records	1		2	3	2		1	1	1		1	
Individuals	1		3	9	4		1	3	2		1	

Table (1): Distribution of 12 out of 28 records of Monk Seals in Lebanon over the months of the year.

Further, the study collected list of threats for the Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore which are mainly urbanization and habitat loss/destruction, deliberate killing by fishermen, illegal fishing practices near caves, pollution, and overharvesting of Monk Seal's food.

All this has raised the importance of the Mediterranean Monk Thus a simple action plan towards its conservation has been developed also within this project, highlighting the needed interventions for its conservation.

In parallel, a simple leaflet was developed highlighting main results of the study, and disseminated for awareness on the critical situation of the Med. Monk Seal.

Please provide the following information where relevant:

Hectares Protected: 225 Km coastal line of Lebanon

Species Conserved: Mediterranean Monk Seal

Corridors Created:

Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impact objectives.

Success/achievements:

- Developed the first study to collate information on the status of Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore since its extinction in 1930.
- Provided evidence of breeding for the Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore (found all over the year, during breeding season, and incidence of pregnant seal).
- Developed an action plan for its conservation. This would trigger conservation action for the Mediterranean Monk Seal at the Lebanese shore.
- Developed a simple leaflet for awareness & distributed to wide concerned stakeholders.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

The study not only collected incidence of occurrence/reappearance of the Mediterranean Monk Seal at the Lebanese shore; but also confirmed breeding evidence.

Project Components

Project Components: *Please report on results by project component. Reporting should reference specific products/deliverables from the approved project design and other relevant information.*

Goal: Promote the conservation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in Lebanon

Objective: Understand the status of Monk seal population in Lebanon

Component 1 Planned: Development of baseline study on the status of the Monk seal population that would trigger conservation action.

Component 1 Actual at Completion:

The implementation of the project covered the shoreline of Lebanon that extends for 225 km with a focus on the areas where the monk seal was most reported, especially between Beirut and Tripoli, including the archipelagos that extends from Mina city to Palm Islands Nature Reserve.

The methodology used to compile data about the monk seal in Lebanon and understand its status included:

- 1- Implementation of a desk research about status of this globally threatened Mediterranean Monk seal, through examination of books, publications, reports, grey reports and media.
- 2- Meeting fishermen, ex-fishermen, anglers, syndicate of fishermen wherever they exist, and boat excursionists to collect information about sighting incidences.
- 3- Organizing in calm sea days boat trips with a professional diver along the sea shore to search for caves and traces of Monk Seal bodies on sandy shores, especially in areas where the Monk Seal was the most recorded.

4- Questioning people about threats to Mediterranean Monk Seal and their mitigation.

This resulted in a comprehensive list of incidences since year 1970 up till early 2016, where the highest frequency of appearance was found in Raouche (25%) and Palm Islands Nature Reserve (20%).

Possible threats to Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore based on the current study are:

1. Habitat loss or destruction due to chaotic extension of urbanization along the shore.
2. Disturbance by heavy human frequentation of Monk seal habitats.
3. Direct killing, mainly by fishermen, especially if caught by fish nets.
4. Occasional death after entanglement in fishing nets.
5. Unbalanced or unfair fishermen-Monk Seal competition for food.
6. Consumption of alien invasive poisonous fishes (i.e. Puffer fish *Lagocephalus sceleratus*) (to be scientifically confirmed).
7. Illegal fishing practices by blasting near caves.
8. Collapsed caves, mainly due fish dynamiting.
9. Repetitive oil spills incidents
10. Pollution from sewerage pipes discharging into the sea
11. Sharp objects (i.e. wood with nails, syringes) brought by sea on beaches, especially if left at the entrance of caves.
12. Some fishermen accused jet skis of causing damage to Monk Seals when the latter resurface above water to breath in air.
13. Other fishermen believed that the overharvesting of seashells and sea snails in some areas may reduce the number of octopuses which feed on such food and consequently contribute to shortage of Monk Seal food which incorporates mainly cephalopods beside fish.

As for the development of a regional Med working group for the Monk Seal including key range states: SPNL started this issue before the project contacting possible experts & organizations within the Mediterranean. In addition to the stakeholders on national level contacted during the preliminary assessment, SPNL team searched further other organizations/NGOs/individuals elsewhere in the Mediterranean who work on monk seal populations, such as Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and Mauritania (range states); and can give advice on data collection/desk research and would like to be involved in protection of Mediterranean Monk Seal through local communities and authorities, using Hima concept. Within the short time of the project & the effort needed and based on our contacts, SPNL team have identified a core group of individuals/organizations that would be considered as a nucleus for the regional Med working group, and the search is still continuous beyond the project.

The list of individuals/organizations identified up till now are:

Note: We have documented email exchanges with each of one of them. They know about our initiative and showed interest for collaboration on regional level. This nucleus will be built on towards the development of larger conservation project.

Organization	Contact person	Country
Mediterranean Protected Areas network-MEDPAN	Chloe Webster	
Seal Conservation Society-SCS	Sue Wilson	
Dutch Seal Rehabilitation Center	Richard Dijkema	Turkey
Sadafag		Turkey
Turkish Society of Divers	Cem Kirac	Turkey
University of Thessaloniki	Theano Terkenli	Greece
Med-ina	George Dimitropoulos	Greece
TISCA	Dr. Luigi Elio Alessandro Bundone	Archipelagos-ambien Italia
IMMRAC		Israel
IUCN SSC Pinniped Specialist Group	Kit Kovacs	
	Lowry	

Component 2 Planned: Development of a simple action plan for the conservation of Monk seal in Lebanon.

Component 2 Actual at Completion:

Based on the results of the study and the identified threats, a simple action plan (made up of 9 outputs and 13 actions) has been developed. This plan will be the basis for the development of a regional conservation project.

Component 3 Planned: Awareness is raised on importance of Monk seal targeting fishermen, visitors at the coast, NGOs, decision makers,.....

Component 3 Actual at Completion:

The most important information has been highlighted, in addition to relevant photos and graphs. The material has been developed into a simple leaflet relevant for awareness about results of the study and importance of the Mediterranean Monk Seal for conservation efforts.

It has been distributed to our marine Hima communities including Qoleileh, Byblos, Palm Islands, Ras Beirut, Tyre, and Ministry of Environment.

As Lebanon has issued in 2014 “Marine the Ministry of Environment “Lebanon’s Marine Protected Strategy” in collaboration with IUCN, they have organized 2 national conferences on 25/4/2016 in Tripoli (Northern coast) and 26/4/2016 in Tyr (southern coast). SPNL took this opportunity where 2 of SPNL staff has attended the conferences, explained the results of the Med Monk Seal study and disseminated the awareness pamphlet. We have reached a large number of involved stakeholders.

Kindly note that the activity of SPNL arranging a final conference was not carried out. Outreach was done at existing 2 high-level national events instead which ensured wider outreach on national level.

Were any components unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project? No

Please describe and submit (electronically if possible) any tools, products, or methodologies that resulted from this project or contributed to the results.

- Baseline study on status of Mediterranean Monk Seal at Lebanese shore + Simple action Plan for its conservation.
- Simple awareness leaflet.

Lessons Learned

Describe any lessons learned during the design and implementation of the project, as well as any related to organizational development and capacity building. Consider lessons that would inform projects designed or implemented by your organization or others, as well as lessons that might be considered by the global conservation community.

Project Design Process:(aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings)

Project Implementation:(aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/Shortcomings)

Other lessons learned relevant to conservation community:

- Baseline studies are highly important in order to plan conservation.
- Collaboration with relevant stakeholders is crucial for collecting information, and raising awareness.
- Involving stakeholders in conservation is an important decision that ensures sustainability.

Additional Funding

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
	Senior management supervision (In-kind contribution)	4,500 \$	Project co-financing
			Grantee and Partner leveraging (other donors are interested based on the results of the baseline study)

**Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:*

A) Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)

B) Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)

C) Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)

Sustainability/Replicability

Summarize the successor challenge in achieving planned sustainability or replicability of project components or results.

The results of the current study have provided baseline information on the status of the Mediterranean Monk seal population in Lebanon. This study has helped in the development of a simple action plan for its conservation in Lebanon and prevention of its extinction. The developed study has already created interest from donors for further support in order to implement the action plan for the conservation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in Lebanon & the region.

Further, contacts and investigations with fishermen and national stakeholders has alerted them to the importance of the Mediterranean Monk seal and the need for its conservation.

The Mediterranean Monk seal is a globally threatened species; thus its conservation is a crucial issue in order to prevent its extinction and complements any efforts done within the Mediterranean region. A nucleus for a Med Monk Seal working group has been initiated & will be built in for future collaboration and joint efforts.

Further action on its conservation is expected to trigger socio-economic benefits in addition to the ecological, as these seal attract ecotourists from over the world in order to watch it; thus supporting the livelihood of fishermen and local communities at the shoreline.

Summarize any unplanned sustainability or replicability achieved.

Safeguard Policy Assessment

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

The current project is not expected to entail any risk (socio-economic, environmental, political or financial). Its main aim is to produce baseline study on the status of the globally threatened Monk seal in order to promote its conservation and extinction prevention.

Additional Comments/Recommendations

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Website, www.cepf.net, and

publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

Please include your full contact details below:

Name: Bassima Khatib

Organisation Name: Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon

Mailing Address: Beirut, Hamra District, Abd Al-Aziz street, Awad bldg., 6th fl.

Tel: 00961 1 748309

Fax: 00961 1 344814

Email: bkhatib@spl.org

Performance Tracking Report Addendum

CEPF Global Targets

(Enter Grant Term)

Provide a numerical amount and brief description of the results achieved by your grant.
Please respond to only those questions that are relevant to your project.

Project Results	Is this question relevant?	If yes, provide your numerical response for results achieved during the annual period.	Provide your numerical response for project from inception of CEPF support to date.	Describe the principal results achieved from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. (Attach annexes if necessary)
1. Did your project strengthen management of a protected area guided by a sustainable management plan? Please indicate number of hectares improved.				Please also include name of the protected area(s). If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
2. How many hectares of new and/or expanded protected areas did your project help establish through a legal declaration or community agreement?				Please also include name of the protected area. If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
3. Did your project strengthen biodiversity conservation and/or natural resources management inside a key biodiversity area identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile? If so, please indicate how many hectares.				
4. Did your project effectively introduce or strengthen biodiversity conservation in management practices outside protected areas? If so, please indicate how many hectares.				
5. If your project promotes the sustainable use of natural resources, how many local communities accrued tangible socioeconomic benefits? Please complete Table 1 below.				

If you answered yes to question 5, please complete the following table

