Mediterranean seal

In 2015 we initiated a study to evaluate the conservation status of the Mediterranean monk seal at the island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea and propose management measures for the effective conservation of the species in the region. The entire coastline of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos (i.e., including the islands of Strofades) and the southwestern coast of Zakynthos was thoroughly investigated in order to: Record and evaluate all existing marine caves (i.e., monk seal shelters) suitable for pupping and/or resting by the Mediterranean monk seal. Record monk seal presence directly (through direct observations) or indirectly (through the presence of hollow depressions, scats, smell etc.) within the monk seal shelters. The study was carried out using a small speed boat and every possible suitable marine cave was thoroughly investigated by snorkeling. It should be noted that for the Strofades islands an ultra-light aircraft was used in order to check the coastline for the possible existence of marine caves. In order to evaluate the overall conservation status of the species in the area the information available through the national Rescue and Information Network (RINT; this network is operated by MOm) was considered.

Six (6) suitable monk seal shelters were recorded in the study area, of which one was suitable for pupping. On the beach of this monk seal shelter a fresh track (hollow depression) was recorded, verifying the recent use of the shelter by a Mediterranean monk seal. In addition, two monk seals were observed swimming (most possible in search for food) in the areas of Vassilikos and Ormos Keriou respectively. Furthermore 65 monk seal observations collected through MOm’s RINT were evaluated.

Considering the above we conclude that:

- The presence of the Mediterranean monk seal in the southern part of the island of Zakynthos is permanent. The local monk seal population uses this area mainly while transiting and searching for food.
- There is no pupping activity within the borders of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos due to very limited availability of suitable habitat in combination to high levels of human disturbance due to tourist activities until mid-autumn.
Following management actions by the Management Body of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos:

- Organize a simple monitoring scheme of the monk seal in the area of Ormos Keriou through direct observations.
- Promote Mediterranean monk seal related environmental awareness activities in the Information Centers of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos.

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