



MONK  
SEAL  
ALLIANCE

**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MONK SEAL CONSERVATION

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The Monk Seal Alliance is a consortium of like-minded foundations optimizing resources to support collaborative conservation and rehabilitation of the Mediterranean monk seal.

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As an apex predator, the monk seal is a keystone species crucial to the health of marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of those who depend on them. It has played a role in Mediterranean cultures, folklore, economies and mythology since Antiquity. Yet it is one of the planet's most endangered marine mammals, with less than a thousand individuals remaining.

Vigorous action to protect the species is showing some encouraging results, but two major obstacles have limited progress: a lack of coordination and collaboration among conservation actors, and a lack of sustainable, dedicated funding. The Monk Seal Alliance addresses both of these challenges.

It leverages members' knowledge of the issues and players involved in Mediterranean monk seal conservation to encourage and facilitate a strategic, cooperative approach across the species' range, while providing conservation actors with a single, strong, issue-specific funding partner.

Today, after a successful launch, two calls for projects and the financing of eight projects covering the species' entire range, **we are inviting new donors and partners to join the Alliance to broaden our reach and impact.**

## ABOUT THE MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL

The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) was once common throughout the Mediterranean Sea and in parts of the adjacent Atlantic Ocean. It is one of two remaining species of ancient seals (the other is the Hawaiian monk seal) and both are at risk of extinction. A third, the Caribbean monk seal, went extinct in the 1950s.

Decades of hunting, deliberate and accidental killing by fishermen, disease, pollution, depleted fish stocks and the destruction and disturbance of habitats have taken a heavy toll on seal populations. By the year 2000, numbers had fallen to around 400–500 seals.

National and regional conservation measures such as creating marine protected areas, working with fishing communities and raising awareness among diverse stakeholders have borne fruit: the current population is estimated at around **800 individuals**. These are concentrated at a few key sites in the Mediterranean (primarily around Greece, Turkey and Cyprus) and in Madeira and Mauritania in the Atlantic. But conservation measures must be sustained, enforced, coordinated and expanded to maintain this positive trend and ensure the species can continue to prosper.

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# ZOOM ON PROJECTS FUNDED

## NATIONAL

In **Greece**, where tourism has increased pressures on monk seals, the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal (MOM) is raising public awareness while ensuring effective surveillance of protected areas within the Alonissos Marine Natural Park and on surrounding islands. MOM is also working with tourism stakeholders to encourage practices that respect the species and its habitat. In the Ionian Sea, the Tethys Research Institute is working to consolidate management and conservation activities aimed at reducing harmful impacts of tourism on seals.

In **Madeira**, where a population of 30 to 40 monk seals is established, the Instituto das Florestas e Conservação da Natureza is working to improve and expand surveillance of the species and its habitat and to implement the Regional Strategy for Monk Seal Conservation. It is conducting surveys throughout the entire archipelago to confirm current habitats and identify potential future ones. Other activities include awareness raising and clearing caves of marine litter.

In **Mauritania**, with a population of about 350 monk seals, the MSA's support allows the Fundación CBD-Hábitat to continue to ensure the monitoring and proper functioning of the Cap Blanc reserve and to initiate work with its partners on developing a methodology for translocation of seals to other sites in the Atlantic to ensure the survival and development of the Atlantic population in the future.

In **Turkey's** Antalya and Müğla provinces, SAD-AFAG is working to strengthen data on monk seal sightings and illegal cave trespassing through a participatory information program. Tourism companies are involved to make sure habitat protection regulations are respected. SAD-AFAG is also working with the government to improve coastal zone management for monk seal conservation, focusing on construction, tourism, fishing and shipping.



## KEY FIGURES



**8** PROJECTS SUPPORTED

**2 757 000 €** COMMITTED

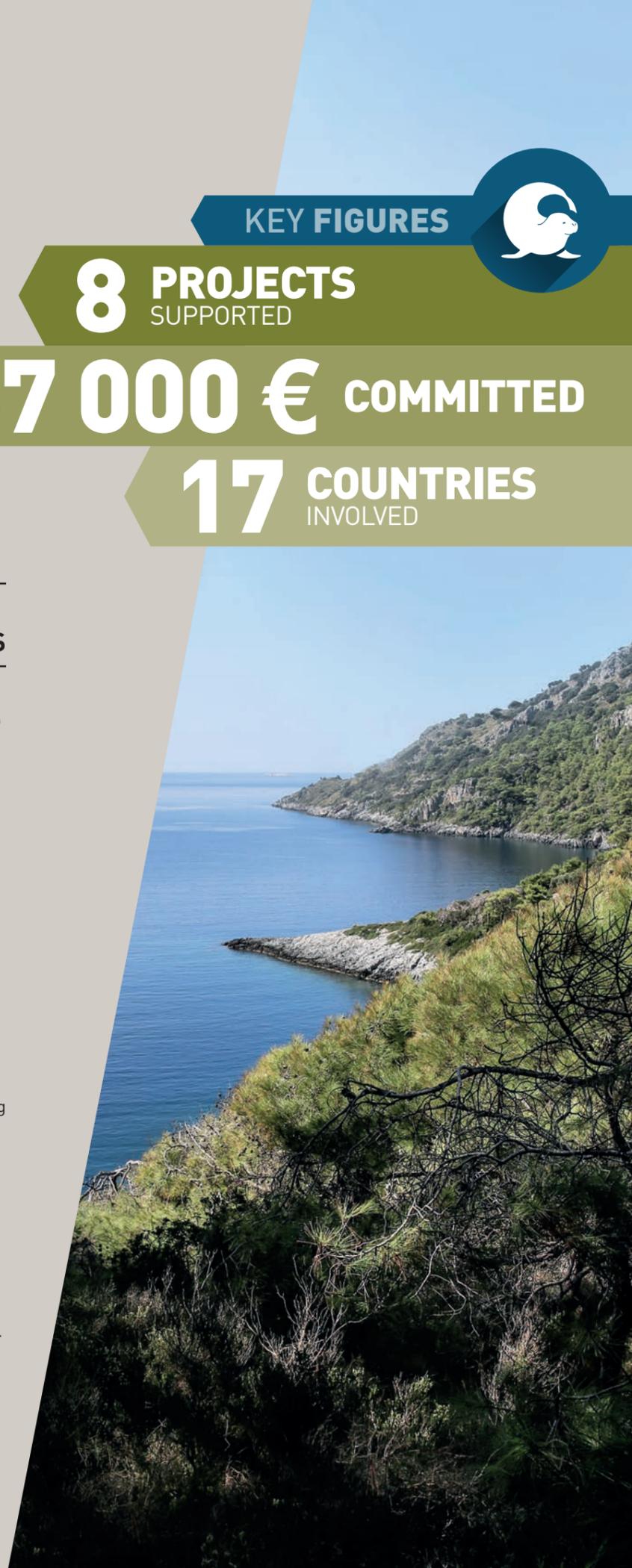
**17** COUNTRIES INVOLVED

## REGIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

A transnational project involving organizations from **Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel and Lebanon** coordinated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) enables monitoring and conservation actions at the local level while encouraging partners to collaborate at the regional level by exchanging experiences, sharing data and developing common indicators and protocols for monitoring seal populations. Other activities include cave cleaning, training and education in schools.

EuroNatur is coordinating a project to prepare countries of the Eastern Adriatic (**Albania, Croatia, Montenegro**) for the return of monk seals by creating structures and capacities for their protection, as conditions there appear favourable for an expansion of monk seal populations from Greece. EuroNatur and partners are building up national capacities in habitat mapping, monitoring, cooperation and raising public awareness.

The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA RAC) is coordinating a capacity-building project in which experienced monk seal conservation actors conduct trainings in countries where the species may live in the future, particularly in the **Southern and Eastern Mediterranean**. This is linked with a project to standardise the field protocol for monitoring of the species to be able to share data at a regional scale.





## WHAT'S **NEXT?**

Much remains to be done to save the Mediterranean monk seal, but with concrete, concerted action, it can be done. Coordination and collaboration among funders and among actors in the field are key to achieving our common goal: to protect this emblematic species and to enable it to flourish into the future throughout its historical range.

**MSA's founding members wish to open the Alliance in the coming years to include other philanthropic actors or foundations interested in working with us on behalf of the monk seal.**

Increasing our funding capacity and growing our network will allow us to launch new calls for projects to support the conservation community's work protecting current and future habitats, educating and sensitizing local populations and economic actors, and building capacity among NGOs. It will ensure the continuity and long-term sustainability of conservation measures now underway, while enabling new research into possible future actions such as translocation of seal populations.

**JOIN US!**

# ABOUT THE MONK SEAL ALLIANCE

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**The Monk Seal Alliance (MSA) was created in 2019 by five founding members experienced in funding Mediterranean monk seal conservation projects: the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, the MAVA Foundation, the Segre Foundation, the Sancta Devota Foundation and the Thalassa Foundation.**

The MSA supports conservation projects at local, national and regional levels. Its calls for projects are designed to create incentives for actors to collaborate with others in the field, avoiding duplication and waste of resources and increasing effectiveness by addressing monk seal conservation strategically, holistically and throughout the species' range.

The MSA's own processes model the mutual respect and collaboration it demands of conservation partners.

## MSA Actions

- ▶ 8 projects: a strategic blend of targeted local efforts and collaborative region-wide projects
- ▶ 2 757 000 € committed
- ▶ 17 countries involved

In 2020, after collaborating to identify all the actors working for the species, the MSA launched two calls for projects to protect the Mediterranean monk seal. The first focused on priority locations where the seals are known to reproduce: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Mauritania and Madeira. The second call was designed to encourage and incentivize collaboration among conservation actors in countries and sites from which monk seals had disappeared but where sightings of individuals are now occurring, suggesting a possible return and new opportunities for recovery.

Eight projects were selected and are now being financed thanks to private donors and MSA member foundations, which have committed over 2,7 million Euros covering the period of 2021-2024.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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