

The Growing Concern of Human-Wildlife Conflict: A Case Study in Turkey

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Section 1: Human-Wildlife Conflict: A Growing Global Trend

Humans and animals have directly interacted with each other for millennia. At first, humans depended on wild animals for survival needs, such as food and shelter; however, as humans increased their population and developed communities, they further distinguished themselves from animals and primitive behaviors. The value of wildlife was then directed towards ornamental and medicinal use rather than traditional subsistence and clothing. Instead of coinciding with nature, humans have greatly modified habitats and drastically disturbed the natural environment that is essential for the survival of many wild species. Humans soon developed the perspective that interactions with wildlife are often positive because of material gained by harvesting species for food and other animal products (Woodroffe et al., 13). However, negative interactions frequently occur between humans and wildlife, such as when domesticated livestock are easy prey for wild carnivores or agricultural crops are consumed by ungulates. As conflict between humans and wildlife increased over time, the survival of wild species has declined to the point where many species no longer exist on this planet. Therefore, human-wildlife conflict has become a growing concern globally that is not restricted to a particular geographical region, but is common to all areas where wildlife and human populations coexist and share natural resources. To help control the increasing conflicts, many global organizations have taken action to protect the natural environment and the wildlife that depend on the Earth's natural resources for survival.

According to the World Conservation Union, the definition of human-wildlife conflict “occurs when wildlife's requirements overlap with those of human populations, creating costs to residents and wild animals” (Distefano, 1). Conflicts have escalated more over the past 50 years than in any previous time period in human history because humans have been changing the ecosystems and biomes of the world more rapidly and extensively (Reid et al., 2).

Additionally, a set of global trends has contributed to the intensification of human-wildlife conflict and change in ecosystems worldwide. These notable trends are human population growth, land use transformation, species habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, growing interest in ecotourism, and increasing livestock populations and competitive exclusion of wild herbivores (Distefano, 2). The most significant change to ecosystems has been the transformation of 24 % of Earth's terrestrial surface to cultivated systems in response to the human population growth (Reid et al., 26). The current human population growth rate of approximately 1.3 % per year has reached six billion people just before the turn of the century ("Population Growth over Human History" 2006). As the human population grows, there is an increasing demand for food, fresh water, energy, raw materials, and access to arable land (Distefano, 2). Expansion of livestock production around the world has also led to overgrazing, land degradation, fragmentation, loss of wildlife habitat, and deforestation of natural land (Reid et al., 47). As the human population continues to grow exponentially, there is no doubt that many countries are experiencing serious habitat destruction and human-wildlife conflict (Leakey, 1). The extinction rate of wild species has increased by as much as 1,000 times over the past several hundred years as humans increased their involvement in changing biomes around the world (Reid et al., 36).

Besides encroachment and taking away wildlife habitats, animals are also removed from their environment for several reasons, such as subsistence and trade, which adds to the decline in species. For centuries, communities of people have harvested and domesticated wild animals for food. Many different species were killed because of dietary essentials such as proteins, fats, and oils (World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 372). However, more recently animals have been exploited for other reasons besides subsistence.

Wildlife has been considered important for utilitarian products for domestic and commercial purposes (Groombridge, 374). Clothing and other accessories such as utensils, glue, needles, and hooks have been made from furs, hides, scales, fins, bones, and feathers of different animals for centuries (Groombridge, 374). In Kenya, elephants have experienced overexploitation during the 1980s as the ivory trade expanded and thrived. Poaching decreased the elephant population drastically from 1.3 million to just 625,000 (Leakey, 1). Most countries that elephants inhabit are impoverished as well as politically unstable and resort to generating significant profit from products obtained from wildlife. The black rhino was also hunted extensively between 1970 and 1992 because of the value of the animal's horn. As a result of rhino poaching, the population numbers fell by nearly 96 % (2). These countries that are exploiting wildlife for products believe they have the right to profit from their natural resources (2). These human activities of using animals for commercial purposes results in a significant sum of money and can severely affect the survival of many rare species. Some products of wildlife are so valuable to humans that trade will continue even when the species has become extremely scarce in the wild, despite the enforcements against such acts (Groombridge, 380).

Different perspectives concerning the increasing trend of human-wildlife conflict are not just confined to developed or underdeveloped countries. Perspectives based on this trend can be divided into two general categories; conserving the environment and conserving business interests. Individuals worldwide either support or oppose the preservation of threatened and endangered animals, depending on their livelihood as well economic status and financial incentives. Nonetheless, there are many ecological organizations helping to conserve the environment by enacting treaties and contracts in different countries worldwide. For example, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is a

well-known international agreement between governments to ban certain trade activities, such as ivory, and to ensure the survival of particular endangered plant and animal species. States or countries voluntarily agree to adhere to the Convention set forth by the organization, but are responsible for adopting its own domestic legislature to ensure that CITES is implemented on a national level (CITES 2006). However, there are certain individuals who possess a different interest in wildlife conservation.

Conflicts between wildlife and humans become more intense where livestock holdings and agriculture are an important part of rural livelihoods, especially in developing countries (Distefano, iv). Damage to personal property, agricultural fields, and livestock has frustrated farmers and pastoralists to the point of seeking revenge for the destruction of their primary source of income. People in developing countries will not hold back from killing a species entirely unless there is a financial benefit in preserving them (Leakey, 2). Increasing competition with wildlife over natural resources has developed negative attitudes towards wildlife conservation.

In developed countries, many corporate businesses express a greater interest in economic growth and stability rather than wildlife protection and survival. For instance, the oil industry in the United States is working to expand drilling into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), a 19 million acre landmass of untouched wilderness (U.S. Department of Interior 2005 and Verhovek, 1). While President Clinton has declared this refuge a “national monument to protect from drilling”, the Bush administration envisions nothing but economic and political gain (Linklater and Gemmill, 1). Also, journalists like Jim Plaquet believe drilling in the Arctic will not put the environment at risk. Plaquet states that “we have proven that we can have both responsible development to meet energy and economic needs and protection of the environment” (1). The main goal of drilling does not go

beyond economic incentives. The great diversity of species in the Arctic Circle is not persuasive enough to prevent businesses from expanding their economic gain. Besides losing much of the natural land to human use and expansion, degradation of the natural environment has also occurred due to exploitation brought on by tourism.

Over the past 50 years, tourism has been one of the top industries as well as the most consistent industry, growing from 25 million to 693 million tourists between 1950 and 2001 (Woodroffe et al., 123). International tourism arrivals have grown exponentially between 1975 and 2000 at a rate of 4.7 % per year and peaked in 2005 with a growth of 5.5 % and exceeding 800 million tourists for the first time ever (Kagagi, 1). This massive growth in traveling brought tourism spending to exceed six trillion United States dollars (USD) globally (1). Because of growth in the past year, tourism has employed nearly 220 million people (1). The tourist industry in the Mediterranean has also benefited from the growth of curious travelers. In particular, Turkey's beautiful country is attracting thousands of tourists to the local shorelines where both sunbathing and site seeing are enjoyed. However, excessive tourist activities in the country have led to the severe decline in the population of many native species, especially the Mediterranean monk seal.

Section 2: Human-Wildlife Conflict: A Study in Turkey

Turkey is a large country within the Asian continent that is surrounded by sea on three sides; the Black Sea in the north, the Mediterranean in the south, and the Aegean Sea in the west (All about Turkey 2006). These clear waters and 8,000 kilometers of shoreline attract thousands of tourists annually worldwide (Embassy of the Republic of Turkey 2004). The country's diverse flora and fauna is also an attracting force, especially when the diverse wildlife number over 80,000 (All about Turkey 2006). As a result of the growing tourist industry in Turkey, many wildlife species have been overexploited and considered endangered as human-wildlife interactions increase. An example of human-wildlife conflict occurring within Turkey today is the endangerment of the Mediterranean monk seal as tourism increases each year. In 2004, the number of tourists visiting Turkey increased by 25% since the previous year and reached nearly 17.5 million visitors ("Tourism in Turkey", 44). It is anticipated that this number will only increase as more tourists are attracted to the beautiful coastlines of Turkey. Unfortunately, the monk seal will eventually face extinction as both pollution and habitat loss, brought on by tourism, continues. To help save the seals that are still living in the Mediterranean, several wildlife conservationists in Turkey have established projects and reserves to monitor and evaluate the seal population. Conflict between humans and monk seals needs to also be addressed by the Turkish government to ensure survival of the native species.

The Mediterranean monk seal is a native marine species to Turkey that was heavily populated in the Mediterranean Sea up until a few decades ago (see figure 1) (Morris, 2). These seals are among the rarest and one of the six most threatened mammal species with only 400 remaining in the wild (WWF, 1). Half of the existing seals can be found between Turkey and Greece, while the other half live in the Atlantic Ocean (see figure 2). Monk seals

can live up to 30 years but are extremely sensitive to disturbance and are slow to breed, which can affect their survival status (Morris, 2). Historically, the seals “inhabited and bred on sandy beaches, but were banished to rocky islands as the Mediterranean was colonized by humans” (Beacham and Beetz, 986). With less than 500 individuals of monk seals remaining, the species has been placed on the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) Red List of Threatened Species and will remain on the list until changes take place to enforce survival of the seals (All about Turkey 2006).

Historically, the Mediterranean monk seal was culturally important and valued because ancient human attitudes toward the seals were not always negative. The monk seal was a common superstition among ancient Turkish seafarers where the mammals “were believed to bring bad fortune if killed and good fortune if met on the sea” (Savas, 4). However, seals were sometimes killed and used for a variety of things in ancient Turkey, but they were never subjected to commercial hunting. The seal’s pelt was used to make shoes, clothes and tents, and the fat was used for oil lamps and candles (All about Turkey 2006). Also, seal hide and blubber were used as drugs in traditional medicine, especially for civilizations that inhabited the coast (Savas, 4). The monk seal was once valued in ancient mythology but are hardly mentioned or recognized worldwide in today’s literature. Therefore, wildlife conservationists in Turkey and international nonprofit organizations are working to spread the word about the importance and status of the seal. Without help it is predicted that in 30 years time the monk seal will no longer exist in Turkey’s waters (Morris, 1).

The severe decline of Mediterranean monk seals in Turkey’s seas is mainly caused by tourism. Turkey’s sun-drenched beaches, gorgeous scenery, and rich history make the coasts an extremely popular holiday resort (“The Mediterranean”, 2). Turkey earned 5.7 billion

USD from tourism revenues in the first half of 2006 as 8.2 million foreign tourists visited the country (“Tourism Briefs”, 2). The majority of these tourists venture from neighboring countries like Greece and Iran, but many come from as far as Germany (see figure 3). The multitude of tourists that visit the country’s shorelines each year has also brought large amounts of pollution. A total of 80 percent of the sewage produced – more than 500 million tons a year – by tourists along the Mediterranean coasts is emptied into the sea untreated (“The Mediterranean”, 2). Pollution released into the sea does more than just cloud up the surface water and block the entrance of light. Toxic algal blooms have become more common in the Mediterranean Sea as more nutrients from sewage are added to the surrounding waters. In 1997, over 100 bodies of monk seals were found along the Cap Blanc peninsula in the Mediterranean after they were poisoned by a toxic algal bloom (Massicot, 1). Alongside habitat destruction caused by tourism facilities, monk seals are losing their habitat from excessive urbanization. Many visitors enjoy returning to the coasts of Turkey and have gone as far as building secondary summer houses, which has also increased domestic pollution in the summer season (Savas, 1). Contamination of the surrounding water negatively affects the marine habitat of many aquatic species and those who are more sensitive to pollution are more likely to suffer more, resulting in a decreased population.

Disturbance of Mediterranean monk seals is also caused by illegal and legal fishing by tourists and the local Turkish fishing industry. The lack of enforcements to monitor fishing can drastically decrease the number of available fish for the seals to eat. After 1980 the monk seal population decreased from nearly 1,000 individuals to 70 surviving in the Mediterranean Sea (“The Mediterranean”, 4). Competition between fishermen and monk seals is very common since they both hunt for the same fish. Also, entanglement in nets can accidentally kill the seals, as they hunt for food that is quickly disappearing due to over fishing by humans,

as well as damage the fisherman's catching device. With destroyed nets, fishermen consider the mammal a pest and lash back by killing the seals in rage.

The coastal regions of Turkey are mainly affected by human-wildlife conflict because wild marine species, like the Mediterranean monk seal, depend on the sea as well as the beaches for growth and survival. Coastal regions, such as the Bodrum Peninsula on the southwest coast of Turkey, encompass the typical habitat characteristics of Mediterranean monk seals. Bodrum Peninsula was originally undeveloped and inhabited by a small population of Turkish seafarers who depended on the sea as their main economic livelihood up until the late 1960's. Sponge diving and citrus plantations were initially the main economic interests of the region, but today the coast is dominated by tourism (Savas, 2). Undeveloped and secluded shores are the most appealing aspect to the tourism industry. As a result, tourism began to spike on Bodrum when roads were built to connect the peninsula with the rest of the country in 1968 (3). From then on the peninsula's reputation developed rapidly as a summer holiday resort. Today, the peninsula has become the second largest center for secondary homes in Turkey, with as many as 120,000 (3). Soon the area was an important employment center that attracted labor locally and from other Turkish cities.

By the mid-1980s tourism dominated traditional economics and changed the region of the peninsula extensively. Marine investors and housing developers were increasingly interested in areas along the coasts of Turkey that were unspoiled and well-preserved. Business investors were determined to turn the attractive shorelines of Turkey into a favorite destination site that would provide new jobs for 40,000 people ("Tourism Briefs" 2006). As a result, traditional tangerine plantations and spongy fishery industry collapsed as divers and farmers turned to tourism for their source of revenue. Also, other individuals, like captains and seamen, switched their occupations to yacht tourism and related businesses (Savas, 4).

As tourism expanded along Bodrum Peninsula in 1980, Mediterranean monk seals struggled to survive as marine investors claimed that a “marina’s economic value is much greater than a seal’s” (6). Eventually, the seal’s habitual symbol of good fortune became less important to the Turks and the species became increasingly rare.

Wildlife managers in Turkey have been working over the past two decades to help reverse the decline of the Mediterranean monk seal. Environmental groups and local activists have been trying to set up new sanctuaries to give these reclusive creatures a chance to breed and working with international conservation groups to raise awareness of the plight of the monk seals (Morris, 2). Turkey acted in 1991 to set up protected areas along the coast for monk seals as part of international environmental protection treaties (All about Turkey 2006). In 1993, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) started a program in Turkey and supported the local Underwater Research Society – Mediterranean Seal Research Group (SAD-AFAG) during research projects on the monk seal. International conservation groups like WWF are planning to extend the surface of marine and coastal protected areas in the Mediterranean in efforts of upholding the population of the monk seal (WWF, 1). The organization is also persuading local fishermen to save any seals entangled in nets as well as convincing the seafarers that the monk seal is important for the environment and biodiversity of Turkey. Yet, persuading the fishermen is a challenge because of their large dependency on fish for their main source of income.

Besides outside help, there has been some support from the Turkish government when several protected reserves were set up and tourist development was strictly limited (Morris, 2). For instance, “the first monk seal protection zone was established in 1990 along the western shores of the Kuder Peninsula...some islands and sub-peninsulas were declared 1st Degree Natural Sites by the Turkish Ministry of Culture... Gundogan Peninsula [was]

declared a wildlife protection zone in 1997...and the Turkish National Committee for the Monk Seal was established in 1993” (Savas, 5). Also, a Mediterranean Monk Seal Information and Research Network (AFBIKA) works in cooperation with a local university and aims to collect research data about the species in efforts to save them. However, progress in the conservation of the seals and its habitat has been slow because of “the powerful economic forces arrayed against the monk seal (tourism, fishing, coastal development), coupled with chronic deficiencies in funding, both from the state and private sectors” (Monachus Guardian 2006).

Even though there has been significant potential to save the Mediterranean monk seal, “there has been no serious or adequately-funded effort to draw coastal dwellers into the conservation process” (Monachus Guardian 2006). Efforts to save the seals have also not been as effective because of the rise in property value along the coasts and the dependency on the sea for financial gain. Besides campaigning by local activists and international organizations, community involvement along the coastline in Turkey is especially needed to save the seals. Conservation of a healthy marine and coastal environment is important to enhance the survival of the species of the monk seal (WWF, 1). Besides Turkey, wildlife management is also practiced all over the world where conservation of particular endangered species is addressed.

Section 3: Human-Wildlife Conflict and Wildlife Management

Human-wildlife conflict has been a growing trend worldwide for the past several centuries. The individuals and organizations concerned about the damage to the environment and wildlife have increased awareness and conservation efforts to protect wildlife habitats globally. Since every country is very diverse in wildlife, management is a popular profession practiced in every part of the world. Wildlife managers are interested in keeping certain animal populations at a stable level to protect endangered and threatened species as well as their habitats. However, management projects are not just focused on animals, but also involve local communities to ensure the needs of humans and nature are balanced. For managers to succeed in conservation, an understanding of people and their aspirations as well as an awareness of the political and economic status is important for implementing effective programs (Bennett, 142). To further help maintain a natural habitat for animal populations, wildlife managers are aware of certain animal behaviors and the natural aspect of the environment. Worldwide there is a growing recognition that human life is interconnected with the natural world and that humans are dependent on nature for survival and advancement (Adams, 141). Responding to the increased concern of losing species due to human interference has grown globally as wildlife managers are raising awareness about the growing trend.

Human-wildlife conflict can be reduced through good management practices, constant community involvement, and strict regulations on certain activities, such as hunting, fishing, and development. Wildlife managers work to establish a network of reserves and protected areas, educate and inform the public, and rescue and rehabilitate the wounded; stranded; and orphaned animals (Monachus Guardian 2006). Along with educating the local community about the importance of animals, wildlife managers are working to compensate pastoralists

and farmers for damage caused by wildlife, which helps reduce hunting pressure on wild animal populations (Bulte and Rondeau, 2). Incentive mechanisms have shown to be effective in decreasing revenge killings and increasing local support and participation in conservation efforts. Programs to compensate wildlife damages have been implemented across the globe, especially in rural areas of poverty stricken countries (3). In many developing countries, the local government is not completely successful in controlling human-wildlife conflict. Often times, the result of ineffective laws and governmental management is caused by corruption from weak systems and the inability to overcome the obstacle in coordinating the international environmental agreements with local policies.

Wildlife management is addressed differently with various intensities around the world, depending on the level of enforcement of laws. Turkey is a typical example of the increase in human-wildlife conflict that is trying to achieve conservation with the help of wildlife managers and international regulations. While Turkey has made effort to change the decline of the native seals, the “progress in the conservation of the species and its habitat has generally been patchy and slow” (Monachus Guardian 2006). In general, environmental protection and resource conservation receives low priority in countries with a struggling economy. Nonetheless, Turkey has made some progress in conserving the seals in the past decade with additional help from international organizations, like World Wildlife Fund, and local research groups.

Typically, countries that are the most effective in managing the conservation of species have laws and policies that have been shaped through public participation in decision-making (Reid et al., 20). Ineffective management often times occurs in governments that are preoccupied with other economic incentives. For instance, Turkey is growing economically due to ecotourism but many wild species are being killed in the process. If conserving the

species affects the growth of the Turkish economy, then less attention and money is directed towards wildlife protection. Also, the United States and the drilling of oil in Alaska has become a huge debate over economic rise and saving the wilderness. However, the difference between Turkey's government and the United States is the implementations of governmental agencies to ensure proper wildlife management practices. For instance, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was founded in the United States in 1973 and has made a huge contribution to the protection of critically endangered species facing extinction due to economic growth and development (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006). Even though Turkey is not effective in implementing national governmental agencies, the country has participated in international agreements that have been effective in shaping the laws and regulations needed to be enforced by individual states and local governments.

Any country concerned about the survival of their native species has agreed upon international contracts to carry out laws and regulations to ensure proper preservation. As a means to protect and conserve our biodiversity, the Convention on Biological Diversity was founded in 1992. During this time, world leaders agreed upon a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development – meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations – and also made a pact to maintain the world's ecological foundations as economic development continued (The Convention on Biological Diversity 2005). The Convention on Biological Diversity was the first global agreement on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity that was rapidly accepted globally. Today, many nations are revising their policies and legislature to reflect the global aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity and as many as 187 countries have ratified the agreement (The Convention on Biological Diversity 2005 and Woodroffe et al., 355).

Besides the Convention on Biological Diversity, there are numerous international conservation groups that are focused on the management of wildlife and natural environments worldwide. The World Wildlife Fund is one example of another large organization that is privately financed to “lead international efforts to protect endangered species and their habitats” (World Wildlife 2006). WWF has extended its organization to 100 countries that are losing their wildlife environment. To help with conserving the various wild species of the world, wildlife managers work with these various non-profit and privately owned organizations, like WWF and the Wildlife Conservation Society, in many different countries where research and protection is essential to secure the survival of certain species.

All over the world there are scientists, wildlife managers, local communities, and concerned individuals that are promoting measures to maintain the continuity of species populations and ecological processes in the face of habitat change (Bennett, 3). For example in New Zealand, ornithologists survey the density of endemic forest birds in unlogged tracts of forests between two mountain ranges (3). In southern Australia, community volunteers drive along the country roads to assess and map the quality of roadside vegetation (3). Countries in sub-Saharan Africa are dealing with conservation efforts to reverse the depletion of large game species, such as lions, elephants, and rhinos, by applying stringent laws reinforced by the government (FAO 2006). The United States and Kenya have worked together to provide an education program through the School for Field Studies (SFS) for students all over the world interested in learning about wildlife management in a third world country. During a study abroad session with SFS, students receive a hands-on experience on what it is like to be involved in wildlife management and work one on one with community members who experience human-wildlife conflict everyday. These efforts put forth by individuals and wildlife managers are part of a practical response to the global issue of habitat

destruction, fragmentation, and isolation in human-dominated landscapes (Bennett, 3). In every country there is human-wildlife conflict as more people interfere with animals and their natural habitat. As a result, there are hundreds of wildlife management projects occurring globally to help control and balance the increasing trend.

As humans continued to differentiate themselves from wild species, exploitation of wildlife became more prevalent. The mentality soon became that, “the less like us a species is, and the more it threatens our interests, the less likely we are to save it” (Woodroffe et al., 358). Therefore, overexploitation of land and animals led to the rapid decline in many species around the world. Also, biodiversity on this planet, which provides a large number of goods and services that helps sustain human lives, decreased substantially (The Convention on Biological Diversity 2005). The case study of the Mediterranean monk seal along the coasts of Turkey is one of many examples of human-wildlife conflict occurring worldwide. Even though efforts to reverse the decline of wildlife brought on by this global trend can not be completely controlled or reversed, individuals and organizations devoted to wildlife management can help stabilize the growing conflict between humans and animals. Wildlife managers are concerned about the loss of species and their habitat, especially with the rapid increase in the human population. Research projects are performed in conjunction with environmental organizations to learn more about a species as well as the habitat that is being destroyed by humans. Besides tending to the animals’ needs, wildlife managers also incorporate human needs so that the trend of human-wildlife conflict is impartial and equally addressed. Ignoring the growing trend of human-wildlife conflict will eventually lead to the extinction of animals and plants all over the world that are regularly depended on for the survival of humans.

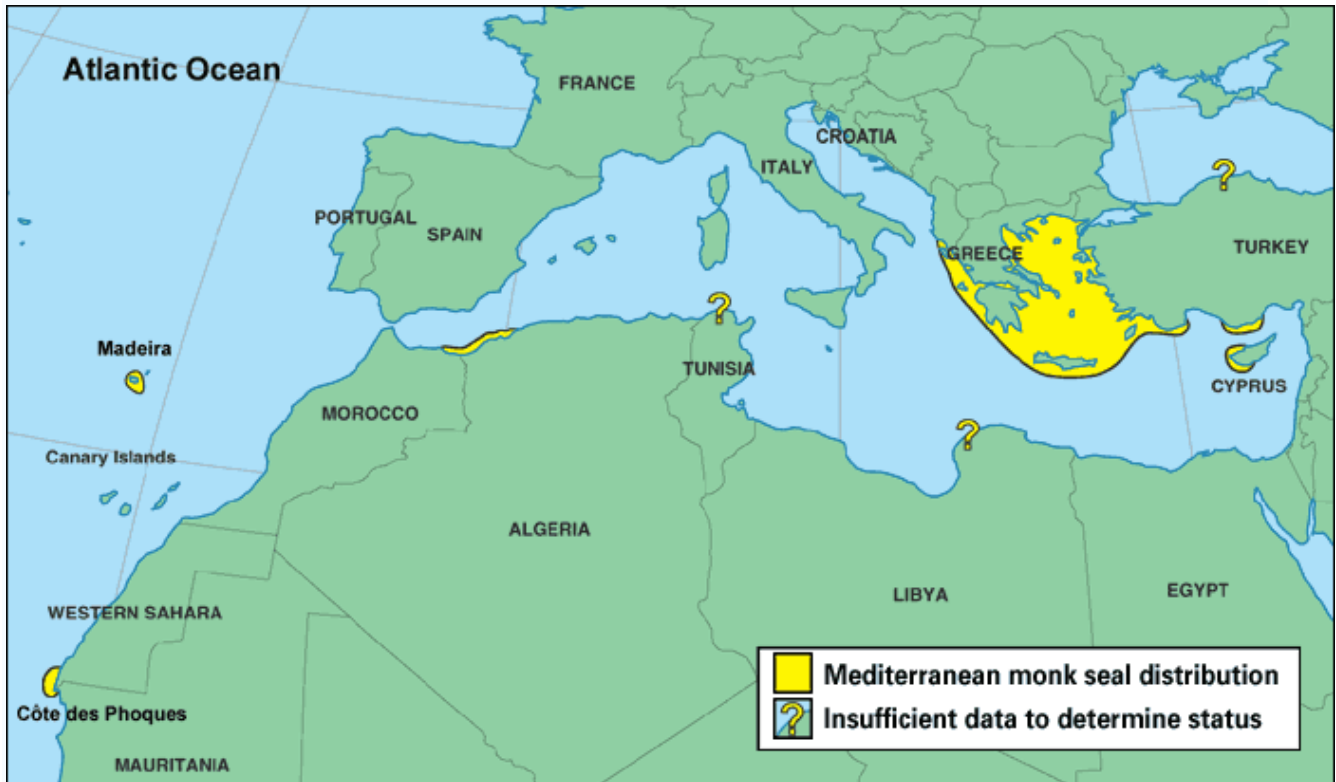
Appendix: Figures

Figure 1 Mediterranean Monk Seal



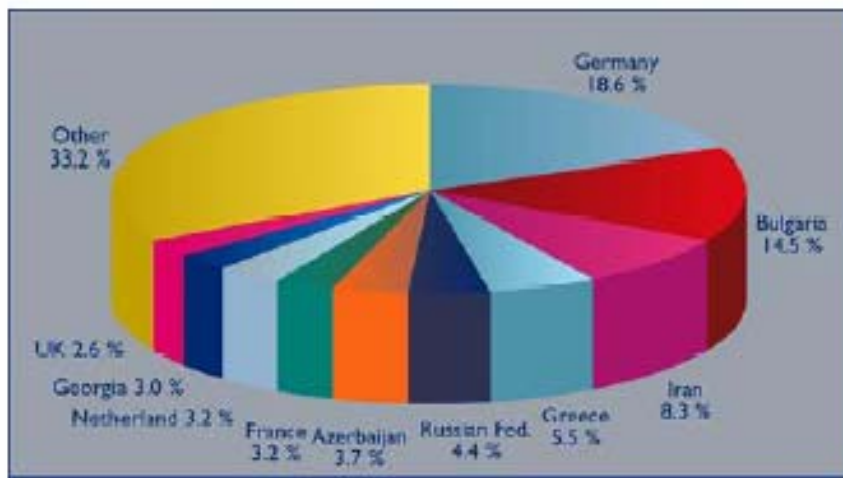
(Photo Oceania 2006)

Figure 2 Distribution Map of the Mediterranean Monk Seal



(Massicot 2006)

Figure 3 Distribution of Tourism by Country of Origin (2004)



(“Tourism Briefs, 44)

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