

A close-up photograph of two Mediterranean Monk Seals resting on a sandy beach. The seals are light-colored with dark patches and whiskers. One seal is in the foreground, looking towards the camera, while the other is slightly behind it.

Mediterranean Monk Seal Conservation Programme

Impact Report



CBD-Habitat



MONK SEAL
CONSERVATION PROGRAM





On the front line, in alliance with nature

CBD-Habitat Foundation

More than two decades ago, alarmed by the loss of biodiversity and the threat of extinction to some of our most emblematic species, we created the Foundation for the Conservation of Biodiversity and its Habitat, CBD-Habitat.

Our mission is to protect our natural heritage. We work on the front line, taking direct action in the field. Our goal is to save critically endangered species and to restore their natural habitats, always in close collaboration with the people with whom they coexist.

An epic story of conservation

For 20 years we have worked to save the Mediterranean monk seal from extinction, protecting the last remaining large colony of this species on the planet. Our work follows in the footsteps of the great explorers, naturalists and pioneers who paved the way for this ambitious project. The successful outcomes provide us with hope for the next challenge in the fight for the survival of these remarkable animals.



Now is the defining moment

Saving one of the most beautiful and endangered species on the planet

Incredible as it may seem today, there was a time when the coasts of the entire Mediterranean and part of the Atlantic were populated by one of the most beautiful and captivating animals in existence, the Mediterranean monk seal.



Only a few hundred of these remarkable animals survived into the 20th century, taking refuge in secluded caves to escape human persecution. The largest remaining group of Mediterranean monk seals on our planet was found in three unique sea caves on the coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula (Mauritania).

In 2001, we created a reserve to protect these caves by land and sea, to prevent the seals from drowning in fishing nets, and to ensure that no one disturbed their breeding sites.

In 1998, only 100 Mediterranean monk seals remained at Cabo Blanco, sheltering in precarious conditions in secluded caves.



After more than twenty years of constant work, the colony has not only survived, but has almost quadrupled in size. Today, the colony numbers close to 400 individuals and the number of births has increased from 24 per year to almost 80 today. These are encouraging results that have taken two decades. However, our work is not finished. The species remains critically endangered, and many threats remain.

Working with monk seals in the wild is not easy. To be successful, we have had to develop our own non-invasive tools and procedures

Our tools

Cameras for video surveillance



GPS flipper tags



Camera traps

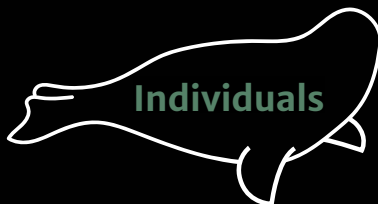


1998

2020

100

Total individuals



+350

Total individuals

24

Pups per year



80

Pups per year





Goal 14.



Life below water

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

Population increase from 100 individuals in 1998 to almost 400 in 2022 and annual births from 25 to around 80 pups.

Highly promising results

The species has been downgraded from **Critically Endangered** to **Endangered**.

Creation of the Seal Coast Reserve

The Cabo Blanco seal colony is protected thanks to the creation of the Seal Coast Reserve, which prevents disturbances in the breeding caves and prohibits the use of fishing nets in the area, preventing the accidental death of seals when entangled in them.

Goal 11.



Sustainable cities and communities

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Social support programme

We have involved key local stakeholders (fishers, school children and authorities) in the conservation process through social support programmes. We have also built the first environmental education facilities for sustainable development in peri-urban areas in Mauritania.

Goal 8.



Decent work and economic growth

Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

Working conditions: safety and equipment

We improved working conditions and safety at sea for small-scale fishers by promoting employment through the sustainable management of Mauritania's small-scale fisheries, training, and the provision of facilities including a medical clinic and a new fish market.

Goal 4.



Quality education

Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

Education for sustainable development

We have developed an environmental education programme in the schools of Nouadhibou to provide Mauritanian youth with sustainable development skills and information on nature conservation in their environment, including the monk seal. More than 8,000 students have already participated in the programme. These actions also contribute to raising awareness and changing the behaviour of adults in their family environment.

Goal 17.



Partnerships for the Goals

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Financial resources for Mauritania

Mobilisation towards Mauritania of numerous financial resources from various programme funding sources.

Goal 12.



Financial resources for Mauritania

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Contributing to the development of sustainable fisheries

We identified, promoted, and secured a major framework project to support more sustainable management of the small-scale fisheries in the north of Mauritania.



The challenges of today and tomorrow

What will it take to bring the Mediterranean monk seal back from the brink of extinction?

Despite the positive results, the species remains critically endangered and many threats remain: there is a risk of a new mass die-off from disease, the three caves in which the seals live are continually collapsing, rising sea levels threaten the breeding beaches inside the caves, and the nearby town of Nouadhibou is expanding towards the colony.

We want to create new monk seal populations in the places where they once lived and should never have left.

A network of Atlantic monk seal populations will ensure the long-term survival of the species.

Join our adventure!
Let's work together to shape the future of one of the most beautiful and captivating species on the planet.



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