

Introduction

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea approximately 65 km south of Turkey, 105 km west of Syria, and 340 km north of Egypt. The country's 648 km of coastline is variable, with sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, sea caves, and steep inaccessible cliffs. The climate is Mediterranean with long dry summers (May–October) and mild winters (December to February).

Since 1974 Cyprus has been partitioned into the the Republic of Cyprus which controls the southern two thirds of the island and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which holds the northern third. As of 2018, with UN assistance, talks are continuing in an effort to reunite the island.

Off the coast of the Karpasia Peninsula, the Kleides Islands are breeding and nesting areas for seabirds. The Famagousta Lakes host waterbirds year-round and breeding ibis, stilts, herons and egrets. The Larnaca Salt Lakes, a RAMSAR site, is important for migratory and wintering waterbirds.

Ronnas and Alagadi Beaches are key green and loggerhead turtle nesting sites. Other nesting sites are found in North and South Karpaz, on the Akrotiri and Akamas Peninsulas, and along the North and West Coasts of the country. The Akamas Peninsula, Cape Greco, Limassol, and Xylofagou have been identified as either present, or potential, Mediterranean monk seal habitat.

At Risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (V), Endangered (E) or Critically Endangered (CR).

Avian species – Many species of waterbird migrate through, winter on the island, or are resident in Cyprus. Species of special concern include white-headed duck (E), marbled teal (V), common pochard (V), and Yelkouan shearwater (V).

Marine mammals – The Mediterranean monk seal (E) inhabits areas along the coast where sea caves exist. Bottlenose dolphin are found both in nearshore and offshore waters, sperm whales (V) are rare but regular visitors to deep canyons near the island, where Cuvier's beaked whales may also be present. Other offshore species include striped and rough-toothed dolphins.

Marine reptiles – The beaches of Cyprus host ten percent of the loggerhead (V) and thirty percent of the green (E) sea turtle nesting populations in the Mediterranean. Although rarer, leatherback (V) turtles may sometimes be seen foraging in the waters around Cyprus.

Regional Seas

Mediterranean Sea

Past experience

In addition to several minor spills with no reports of impacted wildlife, a number of birds were oiled in 2013 after a tanker spilled more than 100 tonnes of fuel in Famagusta Bay on the southeast side of TRNC. No formal oiled wildlife response was mounted.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Republic of Cyprus' 2014 National Contingency Plan (NCP) update, while not formally approved as of 2016, would be applied should a spill occur. The Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment's Department of Fisheries and Marine Research (DFMR) Fisheries and Pollution Control Division is the Competent Authority.

The Department of Merchant Shipping (DMS) within the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works would be the agency authorised to request assistance from EMSA when needed. Emergency Response Centres (ERCs) would be established through DFMR regional offices for minor incidents and at the Nicosia Headquarters for larger responses.

The DFMR's Naval Service is responsible for combatting small oil pollution incidents at sea.

The Republic of Cyprus does not respond in TRNC unless their assistance is formally requested. TRNC does not have an oil spill response plan as of 2018.

In larger incidents, REMPEC would be mobilised.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines within the NCP for response to oiled wildlife.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation would likely be allowed with euthanasia employed on a welfare basis, however, there is limited capacity for wildlife rehabilitation in either the Republic of Cyprus or the TRNC.

Impact assessment

The Department of the Environment oversees impact assessment. The University of Cyprus' Oceanography Centre in the Republic of Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean University (Dogu Akdeniz Üniversitesi)'s Water and Marine Sciences Research Center (SUDEM) in TRNC might be involved.

The Society for the Protection of Turtles (SPOT) in TRNC, BirdLife Cyprus, and the Turkish Cypriot Society for the Protection of Birds and Nature (Kuskor) might assist with turtle and avian impact assessment respectively. Should monk seal habitat be at risk, the Underwater Research Society-Mediterranean Seal Research Group (Sualti Arastirmalari Dernegi-Akdeniz Foku Arastirma Grubu or SAD-AFAG) would likely be involved. SAD-AFAG might request assistance from the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection Monk Seal (MOM), and other members of the International Monk Sea Alliance.

Notification and early response

There is no system for notification of, and early response to, oiled wildlife in either the Republic of Turkey or the TRNC.

Wildlife responders

The Marine Turtle Conservation Project (MTCP) a collaborative effort between SPOT, personnel from the Marine Turtle Research Group at the University of Exeter and the TRNC's Department of Environmental Protection might be able to assist with field assessment, capture and evaluation of turtles but they have no rehabilitation experience. The Meritta Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center would be able to provide rehabilitation for turtles and may be able to assist with rehabilitation of other species.

Neither Birdlife Cyprus nor Kuskor do any avian rehabilitation but they may assist with mobilisation of volunteers, field collection, and post-release monitoring.

Any monk seal response would likely involve personnel from SAD-AFAG, MOm, and other members of the International Monk Seal Alliance.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Birdlife Cyprus and Kuskor cooperate on bird surveys and census. Marine Turtle Conservation Project groups work together to protect nesting sites, reduce turtle bycatch, continue monitoring Cyprus' turtle populations, and give sea turtle conservation classes and field trips for school groups. SAD/AFAG works with other members of the International Monk Seal Alliance on monk seal conservation.

Cyprus is a signatory to the Barcelona Convention, member of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre (REMPEC) for the Mediterranean, has a Sub-Regional Agreement for joint response with Greece and Israel and a Trilateral agreement and Sub-regional contingency plan with Egypt and Israel.

Permanent facilities

The only facility on the island of Cyprus that rehabilitates wildlife is the Meritta Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center, which was established by Merit Hotels, under a protocol signed with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of the TRNC.

There are no facilities for marine mammals or birds but Meritta may be able to accommodate a small number of these species.

Current processes

A POSOW Oiled Wildlife course was given in 2013, with over 30 people in attendance.

Cyprus participated in the 2017 Marine Oil Pollution Exercise in conjunction with Greece, Israel and REMPEC.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile (2011)

REMPEC Country Profile

Birdlife Country Profile

Casale, P. et al. 2018. Mediterranean sea turtles: Current knowledge and priorities for conservation and research. *Endangered Species Research* 36:229-267 <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr00901>

Stokes, K. L., et al. 2015. Migratory corridors and foraging hotspots: critical habitats identified for Mediterranean green turtles. *Diversity and Distributions*. 1-10. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ddi.12317>

The Mediterranean Monk Seal in Cyprus. Department of Fisheries and Marine Research Document.

Ryan, C. et al. 2014. A visual and Acoustic Survey for Marine Mammals in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea during Summer 2013. *Marine Conservation Research International*.

Terms and Conditions

These Country Wildlife Profiles are provided in good faith as a guide only and are based on information obtained from a variety of sources over a period of time. This information is subject to change and should, in each case, be independently verified before reliance is placed on it. Country Wildlife Profiles may have been issued solely to incorporate additional or revised information under one heading only. Each Profile has therefore not necessarily been completely verified or updated as at the stated Date of Issue.

Sea Alarm hereby excludes, to the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, any and all liability to any person, corporation or other entity for any loss, damage or expense resulting from reliance or use of these Country Wildlife Profiles.

© Sea Alarm Foundation, 2018

These Country Wildlife Profiles may be reproduced by any means for noncommercial distribution without addition, deletion or amendment, provided an acknowledgment of the source is given and these Terms & Conditions are reproduced in full.

These Country Wildlife Profiles may not be reproduced without the prior written permission of Sea Alarm Foundation either for commercial distribution or with addition, deletion or amendment.