

## Introduction

The Hellenic Republic of Greece is located in south-eastern Europe, on the southern end of the Balkan peninsula. In the north, Greece is bordered by Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, and Bulgaria; in the east by the Aegean Sea; in the west by the Ionian Sea; and in the south by the Mediterranean Sea. Greece has a large mainland, the Peloponnese, and a collection of over 6,000 islands and islets. Only 227 of the islands are inhabited, and, of those, only 78 have more than 100 inhabitants. Crete is the largest island, followed by Euboea, Lesbos, and Rhodos. All the other islands are two thirds of the size of Rhodos or smaller.

The Greek islands are traditionally grouped into clusters: The Argo-Saronic Islands in the Saronic Gulf near Athens; the Cyclades, in the central Aegean Sea; the North Aegean islands off the west coast of Turkey; the Dodecanese in the southeast between Crete and Turkey; the Sporades, off the coast of Euboea; and the Ionian Islands, located to the west of the mainland in the Ionian Sea.

Greece's approximately 16,000 kilometres of coastline varies from sandy and rocky beaches to steep cliffs and caves. A limited number of marshes, mudflats and lagoons are found mostly on the Ionian Sea coast. The Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean Marine Mammals, which encompasses the Ligurian Sea and parts of the Corsican and Tyrrhenian Seas, is important habitat for whales and dolphins, as well as other marine wildlife.

## 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 – Within the Aegean Sea there are important areas for migratory waders in the northern Sporades and on the northwestern coast of Alonnisos. The islands and islets around Western Skyros host breeding seabirds, and various areas on the coast of Lesbos are home to breeding, passage, or migratory waterbirds and waders. Akythiria Island, at the juncture of the Mediterranean Sea with the Sea of Crete, is one of several migratory bottleneck points. Along the Ionian Sea coast, the lagoons and marshes of the Amvrakikos Gulf, are important for wintering ducks and geese and migratory waders, as is the Acheloos Delta, Evinos Estuary, and the Mesolongi and Aitoliko lagoons complex, and the Kalogria lagoon, Lamia marshes and Kotychi lagoon complex.

Species of special concern include the slender-billed curlew (CR), white-headed duck (E), red-breasted goose (V), lesser white-fronted goose (V), long-tailed duck (V), common pochard (V), horned grebe (V), Yelkouan shearwater (V), and black-legged kittiwake (V).

Marine mammals – Of great concern in Greece is the Mediterranean monk seal (CR), which breeds in caves along the coast, particularly within the Aegean Sea and Sea of Crete. Other marine mammals found in Greek waters include the Mediterranean populations of striped (V), bottlenose (V), short-beaked common (E), and Risso's dolphin, as well as sperm (E), fin (V) and Cuvier's beaked whales. The Black Sea harbour porpoise (E) is a rare visitor to northern Greece. Most of these cetaceans are found offshore, however, the limited size of the Aegean Sea and Sea of Crete bring them closer to shore in these areas.

Marine reptiles – Loggerhead (V), leatherback (V) and green (E) sea turtles forage around Greece, however, the loggerhead is the only species that nests there. Loggerhead nesting areas include Zakynthos in the Bay of Laganas; and the shores of Kyparissia Bay, Lakonikos and Koroni in the Peloponnese; and at Rethymno, Bay of Chania, and Bay of Messara on Crete.

## Regional Seas

Mediterranean Sea (Ionian Sea; Aegean Sea)

## Past experience

There have been a number of spills in Greece. Between 1979 and 2000 most were in harbours and/or in the vicinity of refinery installations. Offshore spills included Messiniaki Frontis (1979; 7,000 tons of crude off Southern Crete); Geroi Chernomorja (1992; 8,000 tons of crude in the Aegean Sea); and the cement carrier Eurobulker X (2000; 500 tonnes of fuel oil/diesel in Lefkandi). In 2007 a relatively small oil spill occurred when the ferry Sea Diamond, carrying 450 tonnes of fuel oil, sank after hitting a reef near Santorini. In 2017, the Agia Zoni II, which was carrying 2,500

tonnes of fuel oil and marine gas, sank off Salamina Island with oil spreading as far as Athens. No oiled wildlife response has been reported in connection with any of these incidents.

**Response: the role of the authorities**

The Director of the Marine Environment Protection Directorate, in the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, is the Competent National Authority for oil spill response. The Directorate may work with the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Navy and other relevant Ministries during larger incidents. Small spills are handled by local port authorities, with the 15 Regional Marine Pollution Combatting Stations assisting as needed and coordinating larger spill responses.

**Oiled wildlife response**Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response in the Greek National Contingency Plan (NCP).

Response objectives and strategy

There is no formal response objective or strategy, however, it is expected that responders (see Wildlife Responders below) will attempt to rescue and rehabilitate where possible, particularly when listed species are affected.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Although the NCP does not directly address this, the positive response to Preparedness for Oil-polluted Shoreline clean-up and Oiled Wildlife interventions (POSOW) activities indicate that rehabilitation would be allowed. Under POSOW guidelines, euthanasia would be considered as welfare of the individual animal indicates.

Impact assessment

It is likely that the government agency, the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR) would oversee impact assessment and that groups such as the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) and Archipelagos may be involved as well.

Notification and early response

Although there are no formal guidelines for notification and early response, the NGOs experienced in response to marine wildlife have good working relationships with the Marine Environment Protection Directorate and would likely be notified and allowed to respond.

**Wildlife responders**

There are a number of specialised groups in Greece working on the conservation, protection and welfare of a variety of animals. For the Mediterranean monk seal, it is the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal (MOM). MOM has a small research vessel which is employed in the northern Aegean Sea surveying for monk seals and dolphins, and several smaller boats used in rescue and release activities.

Archelon (The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece) and Medasset, an organisation that also works in multiple Mediterranean countries, are both active in sea turtle conservation. Medasset is more active in research, protection of habitat, and advocacy, while Archelon protects nesting beaches and rescues and rehabilitates injured turtles. The Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation also has a stranding response program for cetaceans and turtles, responding to both live and dead strandings. WWF Greece monitors and protects sea turtle nesting beaches on Zakynthos.

HOS leads a network of volunteers monitoring and protecting several important bird areas in the country and maintains the Greek Bird Atlas.

Several research institutes are active in marine wildlife monitoring and conservation. WWF Greece, in cooperation with the Tethys Research Institute works two long term projects, a Cetacean Sanctuary Research project in the Ligurian Sea and an Ionian Dolphin project in western Greece.

The Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, in addition to marine wildlife monitoring and conservation, is developing a sanctuary in Vroulia Bay on the island of Lipsi which will serve as a refuge and rehabilitation facility for captive dolphins and provide veterinary care for wild marine mammals and sea turtles for return to the wild or permanent care in the sanctuary.

**Cooperation between stakeholders**

Archelon and MOM, along with WWF Greece, participate in the Board of the Management Agency for the National Marine Park of Zakynthos at the request of the Ministry of Environment and Energy. Between 2009 and 2012, HOS, MOM, HCMR, and the Technological Educational Institute (TEI), in cooperation with Portuguese Society for the Study

of Birds (SPEA), completed an EU LIFE-Nature project involving conservation actions for the EU listed Mediterranean shag and Audouin's gull, which identified important habitat for these species and other marine birds.

The Tethys Institute worked with a number of national and international organisations on the development of the Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean Marine Mammals.

In addition to the Barcelona Convention (with other states bordering the Mediterranean) and its REMPEC Regional Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean, Greece is a signatory, along with France, Italy and Monaco, to the treaty which established the Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean Marine Mammals and holds a Bilateral agreement with Italy covering response in the Ionian Sea.

### **Permanent facilities**

MOm has a small hospital on Alonnisos where orphaned pups are regularly rehabilitated for return to the wild. Archelon has a Sea Turtle Rescue Centre in Glyfada and maintains first aid stations near Rethymnon, Crete and on the Amvrakikos Gulf.

### **Current processes**

Archipelagos is in the process of developing the Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (AMLS) in the northern Dodecanese which will be equipped to care for cetaceans, turtles and monk seals.

### **Documentation and references**

General references

ITOPF Country Response Profile (2011)

REMPEC Country Profile

BirdLife International Country Profile

POSOW Report Greece National Pilot Training Course

Hellenic Ornithological Society Brochure: EU-LIFE Nature project

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