

# The Mediterranean monk seal, *Monachus monachus*, in Northwest Africa (Tunisia to Mauritania)

by

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Recent publications giving present distribution of the monk seal suggest that this species has almost vanished from Northwest Africa [JACOB 1973, RONALD 1973]. Reviewing published material, RONALD [1973] writes that whelping takes place in September and October. Our survey modifies this knowledge of the distribution and birth period of the Mediterranean monk seal.

Fifty manuscript references containing data about the past and present distribution of this seal were received following the mailing of 350 questionnaires and the publication of two ads.

The information thus obtained indicates clearly that the monk seal is still widespread in Northwest Africa. The localities where this seal has been sighted since 1970 are shown on Fig. 1, as well as the areas for which no information is available (?).

Seals are most abundant near Oran, Algeria and at the Cap Blanc in Southern Spanish Sahara. In Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, the numbers of seals are reported to be decreasing. At the island of la Galite, Tunisia, there were at least 30 seals in 1950 while only 3 remain in 1974. Elsewhere in Northwest Africa, sightings prior 1965 were often of 2-5 seals, but since 1970 are most often of 1-3 seals. The Cap Blanc colony is near stable : best counts are 60 seals in 1948 [POSTEL 1950], 57 in 1959 [G. TIXERANT, *pers. comm.*] and 50 in 1973 [R. DUGUY, *pers. comm.*]. In Madeira, 20 to 30 seals were estimated in 1973. Data are not sufficient to allow an accurate estimate but the monk seals in Northwest Africa possibly number between 200 and 500 at present.

At la Galite, prior to 1950, newborn pups used to be found at any time of the year and there was no definite birth season [A. CONTI, *pers. comm.*]. At Cap Blanc, one newborn was found on 21 May 1959 [G. TIXERANT, *pers. comm.*] and another one on 7 July 1973 [R. DUGUY, *pers. comm.*]. Thus whelping is not confined to September and October as previously reported and may occur at any season during the year.

The study of this seal is being continued and information on its present distribution and trend in abundance (decreasing or increasing) in areas marked with question marks on Fig. 1 would be welcomed, as well as any information about newborn pups.

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## References

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