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By **Patricia Claus**

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Seal sunning itself on an Alonissos Island beach. Credit: Facebook/Alonissos Insider

[The seal protection organization the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal, or MOM,](#) issued a statement via social media on Thursday after Wednesday's incident involving a wild seal that bit a female tourist off the [Greek island of Alonissos, in the Northern Sporades.](#)

The woman was hospitalized on the nearby island of Skopelos but had to be transferred to a larger hospital on the mainland, in Volos, due to the severity of her injuries.

The 50-year-old foreign tourist had been on a sailboat in the first zone of the Marine Park of Alonissos, near Kyra Panagia island, when she was bitten.

As part of a public information campaign, the organization called [Archelon, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece](#), also issued a statement and guidelines on what to do if you come upon a sea turtle in the wild.

Greek seal bite

The woman who is now hospitalized had spotted the seal swimming and decided to approach it in her boat to see it from up close and pet it. However, the wild animal was naturally spooked due to her proximity, and it panicked, attacking her.

The seal bite caused severe damage to the woman's legs and she was badly injured. The people she was traveling with originally [brought her to the Skopelos Health Center](#) so she could be treated on the nearby island.

Unfortunately, her injuries were very serious and following administering first aid, the doctors at the Health Center felt it was better for her to be transferred. She is now in Volos, on mainland Greece, where she is being cared for at Achillopouleio Hospital.

The MOM statement is as follows: "The news of the seal bite at a tourist in Alonissos came out yesterday. First, we would like to express our regret that a fellow person had this unpleasant experience and wish her a speedy recovery!

"However, it is necessary to use this event for all of us as a reminder that the Mediterranean seal is a marine mammal located in its natural habitat. The truth is, wildlife reacts to situations it faces unpredictably and understanding, respect and attention is expected from us.

The organization went on to state that although the Mediterranean seal, *Monachus monachus*, has not been observed to be an aggressive animal, it is nevertheless wild. Viewing the seals as "friendly" or "used to people" is a way of anthropomorphizing animals.

"We should remember," MOM went on to state, "whether we are talking about the North Sporades Alonissos National Park, or anywhere elsewhere in Greece, that this is a completely humanized perception.

"In fact, the only thing we can control during a possible Mediterranean seal meeting is our own reaction, and this should always be to quietly walk or

swim away and make no move to approach it” although to us it might appear that it “wants to play.”

“With regard to this incident, MOm is in the process of collecting all necessary information about the event so that there is a clear picture to in order to come to the proper conclusion and to take any action necessary.

“Since summer is at our gates, we’d like the public to remember what to do if we see a seal in or out of water, [by following these guidelines, which you can access here.](#)”

The organization has been spectacularly successful in protecting the Monachus monachus, bringing it up from a status of “extremely endangered” to “endangered.”

Mediterranean Monk Seal almost hunted to extinction in the past

In February of 2016, a rare feat in environmental protection took place when the [Hellenic Society for the Study & Protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal \(MOM\)](#) announced that the seal had made an unexpected comeback in the Aegean, with its population recovering to the point where it was no longer considered “critically endangered.”

The monk seal dropped down one category on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, from “critically endangered” to “endangered.”

And the beloved seal is holding its own, thriving in the protected waters of the [National Marine Park of Alonnisos and the Northern Sporades.](#)

Ever since that remarkable milestone was met, [the organization has done its utmost to keep the Monachus monachus protected](#) in the seas off Greece, succeeding beyond its wildest dreams.

With an office in Patitiri on the Northern Sporades [island of Alonnisos](#), MOm is able to keep a close eye on the [National Marine Park of Alonnisos and the Northern Sporades](#), which stretches between Alonnisos and nearby smaller islands.

Established in 1992, it was the first marine park established in Greece by Presidential Decree.

Although it is a marine sanctuary for the *Monachus monachus* and other wildlife, boaters and other visitors are allowed to visit its waters as long as they comply with regulations in place there.

It is currently the largest protected marine area in Europe, at approximately 2,200 square kilometers (849 square miles). Within its boundaries lie the [Underwater Archaeological Park of Peristera](#), an islet off Alonissos, which protects one of the most spectacular shipwrecks ever found.

Even portrayed on Ancient Greek vases throughout antiquity, the seal has been a part of the seas around Greece since time immemorial. But they were almost hunted to extinction by the Romans for their fur and oil.

Ancient Greeks treasured the seals, even believing that they were under the protection of the gods Poseidon and Apollo because of their love for the sea and their seeming worship of the sun.



Mariner patting a wild sea turtle. Credit: Facebook/Archelon

The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, Archelon, also issued a statement on Thursday, reminding the public that it is not advisable to touch any marine animal in the wild. "Every time we forget that sea turtles belong to the wild, we may be reminded in an unpleasant way," they cautioned.

"For example, if someone gets the chance to meet a turtle at sea, they may try to approach it by swimming to touch it, or worse, to throw some human food to it.

"The reactions of these ancient animals, however, do not resemble those of pets. A turtle at sea can chase you away from its living space. Also, if it has been fed at this spot by humans, it can approach you and bite you."



Sea turtle feeding on apple. Credit: K. Papafitsoros/Archelon

"Some years ago, in the summers of 2016-2017, we observed tourists feeding sea turtles in Laganas Bay, a nature protection area established for sea turtle conservation," stated Nikoletta Sidiropoulou, the Archelon officer for Zakynthos.

“Fortunately, the National Marine Park of Zakynthos informed the owners of tourist boats in the area, and we informed visitors in our kiosks. Consequently, no such observations have been reported from 2018 onward,” she added.

In March of 2020, however, during a television show by the famous chef Akis Petretzikis called Akis’ Food Tour, Archelon notes, “we watched the owner of a tavern in Limeni boasting that he has been feeding the four sea turtles of the area on the remains of fish, octopus and squid every day, for at least a year.

“The result: 40 cases of bathers bitten by the turtles in the summer of 2019 and 170 cases in the summer months of 2020, which was confirmed by the Areopolis Health center nearby,” the statement noted.

Panagiota Theodorou of Archelon stated that “We explained that in the places which a sea turtle associates with food provided by humans, it tends to treat bathers and other turtles as competitors in its feeding area and may chase them away with bites.”

The statement adds that the dumping of fish parts, etc., at sea is not permissible in Greece, especially when it forms a disturbance to a protected species.

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