



**Press Release**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2015**

## **Cleaning the most important shelter of the Mediterranean monk seal in the Mediterranean.**

12 hours of hard work, 3 speedboats, 32 volunteers and much positive thinking was all that was needed in order to clean 10 beaches of Gyaros island in the Cyclades and thus provide a safe home to the most important population of *Monachus monachus* in the Mediterranean. It might sound odd but this little island, renown as a former exile place, is one of the safest shelters for this species that is threatened with extinction: at least...10% of the global *Monachus monachus* population lives and breeds on the island.

The aim of the CYCLADES LIFE project is the protection of this unique shelter, hand in hand with the societies of Syros and Andros. The cleanup was thus organized for the purposes of the project on Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> of May by the WWF Greece CYCLADES LIFE field team and a group of volunteers from Syros.

“Each year, piles of marine debris such as fishing gear, plastic bags and metals are “transported” by sea currents at the shores of the island, posing a threat to monk seals that use the shores in order to rest and breed their pups and that is why today’s action is so important for the goal of our project. We thank all those who participated” stated Christos Papadas, responsible for the WWF Greece CYCLADES LIFE field team.

Everything started with the first light of dawn on Sunday at the port of Ermoupolis. Overall 12 hours, 32 pairs of hands, 3 speed boats and much passion was needed to clean 10 beaches of Gyaros from all the marine debris and garbage that had been compiled on the island’s beaches. Everything was transported to Syros where they were subsequently collected by the local municipality’s cleaning service.

For this specific expedition, WWF Greece worked together with Mesogeios SOS, as well as members of the Photographical Association of Syros, the Syros Association of speed boats, the local boy scouts and the cadets from the Mercantile Marine Academy, who participated on their own incentive, to name but a few. Everybody proved their interest for the unique marine treasure and voluntarily offered their services in very good spirits.

“On behalf of the project I would like to thank all those who are supportive of our effort in the creation of a unique protected area in the broader area of Gyaros. It goes without saying that this vision will not be materialized without the active involvement

of the local societies” added Dr. Spyros Kotomatas, the CYCLADES LIFE project’s coordinator.

Gyaros, became part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in 2011 and hosts the most important population of *Monachus monachus* in the Med basin as well as very important marine protected habitats such as Posidonia seagrass beds and coralligenous reefs. The protection of this very important marine treasure is the aim of this project through the creation of an innovative marine protected area model, in the area of Gyaros, together with the communities of Syros and Andros that will function with respect for the environment and humans.

The project is being implemented by WWF Greece together with the Ministry of Reconstruction of Production, Environment and Energy, the Decentralized Administrative Authority of the Aegean, the Development Corporation of the Cyclades SA, the Harokopio University of Athens, MOm/Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Monk Seal and the Italian Institute Tethys.

For more you can visit our website [www.cycladeslife.gr/en](http://www.cycladeslife.gr/en)

#### **Notes to journalists:**

Watch [here](#) audiovisual material from the Gyaros cleanup.

See [here](#) and [here](#) photographic material from the cleanup.

See [here](#) Gyaros’s unique sea bottom.

Read [here](#) about the “Nature Alert” campaign. It is a European campaign that challenges all the possible threats to the legal framework that protect nature and works for the better implementation of the enforcement of European environmental laws.

#### **More information**

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