

Cleaning up Gyaros equals protecting the Mediterranean monk seal

On Saturday the 4th of June, organized in the context of the CYCLADES LIFE project and as a celebration to the World Environment Day, 3 speedboats full with more than 40 volunteers departed from the port of Syros on Saturday morning in order to clean the some of the most important terrestrial habitat beaches of reproduction of the Mediterranean monk seal in Gyaros. This uninhabited island in the heart of the Cyclades, in which 14% of the global Mediterranean monk seal population lives and breeds, is one of the most important shelters of this unique species in the Mediterranean and these clean up actions are an important contribution to its conservation.

Under the guidance of WWF Greece, the coordinator of this action, volunteers from Syros and Athens recorded and then collected every type of waste, such as plastic bottles and bags, fishing gear, household garbage and metal objects from 6 beaches, where young seals are born every year. Studies have shown that waste is one of the main threats of this endangered species that can potentially harm its life cycle. WWF Greece's field team member, Christos Papadas, stated *"Unfortunately our seas are already full of plastic debris that are of a great threat to marine life. However I am optimistic when I see people from Syros who are motivated and well informed to respond again to our call and actively participate in this action"*.

Despite the hot temperatures and the tiredness during the cleanup expedition, the volunteers managed to collect, record, and transport the waste back to the port of Syros, where the Syros Municipality Garbage Collecting Service took charge of it for recycling.



© George Stefanou

In the expedition, for the first time, the Municipality of Syros also participated. The Vice-mayor of Syros-Ermoupolis Mr. Marios Voutsinos, stated *"We were eager to participate in the clean-up expedition in Gyaros and we thank WWF Greece that gave us the chance to do it. For me personally this as a valuable experience and I will try to participate every year. Moreover, as the Municipality representative and*

member of the newly formed Consortium of Stakeholders of Gyaros, we fully support the project's goals and we wish all the best to this initiative”.

Furthermore, numerous local stakeholders participated, like the Club of Rib-boat owners of Syros, scouts, photographers, and students from the University of the Aegean. In addition, the European program LIFEDEBAG (<http://www.lifedebag.eu/>) took part in the expedition as part of the “Week without plastics”, which was organized in parallel in Syros.

Finally, the winners of the event “[Exploring the unknown Gyaros island](#)” also participated in the cleanups and had the opportunity to visit Gyaros for the first time and admire the island that combines natural richness with historical heritage. Nefeli Arditti, one of the winners stated: “*It is such a pity that in a pristine place like Gyaros northern beaches we see filth and so much waste coming from the boats and beaches of the neighboring islands. The project is highly valuable, since no one can imagine how much waste ends up in such unreachable coasts*”.

Notes for journalists:

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

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

Find more material about Gyaros [here](#).

More information

Amalia Alberini, CYCLADES LIFE Communication, tel: 210 33 14 893, a.alberini@wwf.gr

The CYCLADES LIFE project is being implemented by WWF Greece together with the Ministry of 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.

The project CYCLADES LIFE, “Integrated monk seal conservation of Northern Cyclades”, is being implemented with the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Union and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation (<http://www.fpa2.com/home.html>).

