



Press Release

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2016

## New findings revealed for the island of Gyaros

*The island of Gyaros in the northern Cyclades hosts 30 different bird species as well as the largest colony of an endangered sea bird, the Yelkouan Shearwater, states WWF Greece. This is the latest discovery on the rich, but until now “hidden”, wildlife of this former exile island. Previous studies have already shown that Gyaros is a refuge for 14% of the global Mediterranean monk seal population, while 50% of its sea bottom is covered by Poseidonia meadows and coral reefs.*

Is Gyaros island, despite its heavy historical background, full of secrets on what concerns its natural environment? Concrete answers to this question are coming in, as WWF Greece, the Coordinator of the CYCLADES LIFE project, has conducted numerous studies on the flora, fauna, ecosystems and bird species, the findings of which, confirm the considerable ecological value of this former exile island.



### **Gyaros: a “station” island for birds**

More specifically, 30 bird species visit, nest or permanently inhabit on Gyaros. These include raptors like the Bonelli's eagle and the Eleonora's falcon, as well as terrestrial species like the Owl. The most important finding is the newly discovered colony of the Yelkouan Shearwater, an

endangered seabird species, is the largest one to be found in Greece. The northern coast of Gyaros, where most bird species are recorded has been the focus of numerous field expeditions conducted by the CYCLADES LIFE team in close collaboration with Dr. George Katsadorakis, an expert ornithologist specializing in environmental management and with the Hellenic Ornithological Society and the Nature Conservation Consultants.

What is found in the terrestrial part of Gyaros? Some of the inhabitants of the terrestrial environment of Gyaros, are the snake of “Italian origins” (which cannot be found anywhere else in Greece) called “the black snake” of Gyaros and Greek endemic coleopteran species. Rivers of periodical flow, brushwood and cedar formations complete the islands terrestrial mosaic of ecological secrets. According to Dr. Peter Liberakis, Coordinator of a large multidisciplinary team of scientists from the Natural History Museum of Crete, who conducted research on the flora and fauna of Gyaros, *“Published primary knowledge on the island was very scarce, but through this work we now have managed to fill in this gap”*.



While Dr. Spyros Kotomatas CYCLADES LIFE program coordinator, indicates that *“Now we have a good overview of the natural environment of Gyaros, and all the data point to the immediate need for establishing conservation measures that will protect important and sensitive habitats and rare species. This falls well in line with the main goal of the project: the establishment of a model marine protected area around the island, working in close collaboration with the local societies of the Syros and Andros islands, designed to meet the needs of both people and nature”*.

## ***Social media event: exploring the unknown Gyaros island***



For the purpose of introducing Gyaros's secrets to the public, WWF Greece is launching a Facebook event to be held on February 17<sup>th</sup>. The CYCLADES LIFE team will be having direct interaction with the participants of the event, posting photos, stories and historical soundbites while sharing its vision for a model marine protected area, that will not be dependent on prohibitions, but which will serve as an example of a harmonic coexistence between man and nature.

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.

### **More information**

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