



**Press release**

**Friday 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2016**

## **A keystone step for the legal protection of Gyaros**

*Gyaros island is designated as the first marine Wildlife Refuge (WR) in Greece and its legal protection is a step towards the overall conservation of key stone species like the Mediterranean monk seal, of rare sea bird species like the Yelkouan Shearwater, and of its unique sea bottom, 50% of which is covered by Poseidonia meadows and coral reefs.*

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, the Secretary General of the Decentralized Administrative Authority of the Aegean signed the official designation for the legal protection of a unique marine area in Greece, Gyaros island. This small islet is a “refuge” for the 14% of the global population of the Mediterranean Monk Seal and for one of the most important colonies of a rare sea bird, the Yelkouan Shearwater.



Panoramic view of Gyaros by George Stefanou/ WWF Greece

This is a great success for the CYCLADES LIFE project, which is coordinated by WWF Greece. The project’s vision is to establish a unique Marine Protected Area around the Natura 2000 area of Gyaros that aims to highlight the ecological value of the wider area, while promoting sustainable fisheries and the local economies of Syros and Andros.

More specifically, this WR aims to:

- 1) Maintain the current reproduction rates of the local population of the Mediterranean Monk Seal population *Monachus monachus* since Gyaros island hosts 14% of the global population of this emblematic species.
- 2) Conserve and protect critical habitats and foraging area of the Yelkouan Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*).
- 3) Conserve and protect priority habitats of seagrass meadows (*Posidonia oceanica*).
- 4) Conserve and protect coral reefs (*Coralligene formation*)
- 5) Protect fish stocks of the area

The decision was based on the Ecological Documentation Study for the establishment of the marine WR around Gyaros that was conducted as part of the CYCLADES Life project by the consultancy company Nature Conservation Consultants (NCC) on behalf of MOm, one of the project's partners.

"We congratulate the Decentralized Administrative Authority of the Aegean for the creation of the first marine WR in Greece. It is certainly an important institutional milestone that makes us even more optimistic about the future and the proper promotion and protection of this particular region. There is still much to be done but from our side, we are committed to continue this collective effort so that the case of Gyaros be a real role model in Greece and worldwide" said Dimitris Karavellas, director of WWF Greece.

#### **More information**

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#### **Notes for journalists:**

You can visit our website for more information: [www.cycladeslife.gr](http://www.cycladeslife.gr)

For more material, please contact the Press Bureau of WWF Greece.

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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.

