



Poster 225:

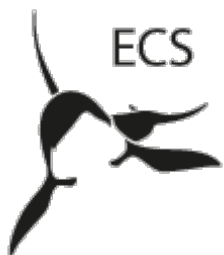
Gathering data on Mediterranean monk seal past presence in Italy

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The Mediterranean monk seal is one of the first pinniped species studied by humankind. However, several aspects of its biology, ecology, and distribution have yet to be unveiled. With the present research, data on Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) individuals captured in the past along the Italian coasts were analysed. The data were recovered by collecting samples, with the related metadata, of specimens preserved in museums (skeletons, bone remains, and stuffed animals), conducting a thorough bibliographical survey, and comparing the information. Most of the captures mainly refer to the period between the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, from the following Italian regions: Sardinia, Sicily, Apulia, Tuscany, Lazio, Liguria, and to a lesser extent Campania and Calabria. Limited data were also collected from the coasts of other Italian regions. The latter, however, represent accounts of even rarer occasional encounters. All these captures may have contributed to the numerical decrease of a species already heavily exploited since the times of the Roman Empire, confirming the results of previous genetic studies. The majority of the consulted literature unanimously reports the presence of the species in specific localities along the Italian coasts while confirming its rarity, already at those times. The overall analysis of the data showed that tiny nuclei of Mediterranean monk seals were still present in the last centuries along the Italian coasts. However, although births still took place, these populations were already reduced in numbers and scattered along the coast. Further studies should be conducted to better understand the ecological role played by the species in the Central Mediterranean. These results could provide suitable insights for conservation and monitoring, on the increasing sightings reported from the Italian coast in recent years.

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