

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Who we are

The Greek Sea is one of the most important biodiversity hotspots of Europe, hosting rare species of cetaceans and mammals, from common dolphins, to sperm whales and unique flora such as seagrass meadows. According to the IUCN Red List these rare species are all threatened with extinction. The Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus* for example, is an endangered marine mammal and almost half of its population is found in the area of Greece.

“*Thalassa*” meaning sea in Greek is a non-profit environmental organisation established in 2013, promoting conservation and sustainability of the Mediterranean, especially in the area of Greece. We are devoted to the preservation of marine habitats through actions and policies ensuring sustainable development.

Blue Islands of Greece

Thalassa Foundation’s holistic approach to marine conservation

Greek islands constitute a driving force for the Greek economy, by attracting thousands of visitors every year who enjoy their beautiful landscapes and hospitality. Due to their commercial significance, the risk of their environmental degradation is substantial. The aim of “Blue Islands” is to preserve their marine natural reserves and engage local communities in pursuing sustainable growth and enhance their natural and cultural heritage from an eco-friendly perspective.

“**Blue Islands**” aims at preserving the marine natural reserves of Greek islands. Under this aim lies our 2015 “**Blue Alonissos**” project consisting of several targeted conservation actions.

Blue Alonissos

A replicable example

Thalassa Foundation works to make Alonissos a strong conservation example by engaging the local community, eventually leading the island's residents to experience **the benefits of a circular economy as a means for sustainable development**. The Foundation's greater aim is to replicate any or all of the Alonissos' projects on other Greek islands.

Alonissos pioneers in terms of environmental preservation and embraces an ecotourism model of development

Alonissos is an island of remarkable marine biodiversity. It has one of the largest marine parks in Europe, which hosts a large variety of rare and endangered species i.e. monk seals, dolphins and other cetaceans. The heart of the Marine Park, the islet of Piperi, is designated as a strictly protected area and one of the most important nature reserves of the Mediterranean monk seal, with almost 1/4 of their total population found in the area.

Having realized the importance of the island's natural reserves, the residents of Alonissos were ready to follow an eco-touristic model of development.

In order to achieve a pioneering new standard, **Thalassa Foundation**, in collaboration with two well-known organi-

sations, *MOM/The Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk and the Mediterranean SOS Network* funded the 14-month project "**Plastic Bag-Free Alonissos**", also actively supported by the Municipality of Alonissos. The project was a great success, and led to the creation of a Coordinating Committee of stakeholders which will be following-up and initiating on more actions so that its results are continued and enhanced.

On September 30th, 2016, an event celebrating the marvellous results of the project and the publicity it gained was hosted by Thalassa Foundation. The foundation welcomed many representatives of official bodies from other islands that wish to follow Alonissos' example.



MAPPING FOR CONSERVATION

Year 2016 was also the year in which the "**Mapping for Conservation**" project was approved. This is a 3-year project (2017-2019) that came as a continuation of the Argosaronikos project, completed in September 2016.

MOM/The Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal undertook the map-

ping of Monk Seal habitats and cubbing sites in the whole of Greece.

The islands of Chios, Oinousses and Psarra were the first areas investigated. By February 2017, the mapping of the Peloponnese will well be under way, and is to be followed by the mapping of the rest of the areas i.e. Crete, Evia, the Ionian and the Eastern Aegean islands (total coastline of about 16.000 kms).

With the completion of this project, which is funded by 1/3 by Thalassa Foundation, for the first time in history, Greece will have a complete picture and a full status report of the areas hosting this wonderful and endangered species. And, this information, together with an integrated Action Plan will be made readily available to the general public, official authorities and Conservationists.

Guarding the NPANS

In May 2016 Thalassa Foundation conceded motorboat Kimolos to the Management Body of the Marine Park of Alonissos Northern Sporades. The scope of the concession was to implement a multitude of vertical actions that will contribute to an integrated protection scheme.

In the pipeline for 2017

At present, Thalassa Foundation is exploring proposals to support scientific research projects on water quality, fish-stocks, seagrass meadows and cetaceans in the NPANS.

Thalassa Foundation will always regard the protection of the marine environment through sustainable development as a crucial priority for humankind and will thus never cease investigating and supporting best practices and ways to engage local communities to also serve this purpose.

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