

The Natura site of Gyaros

Protection does not mean exclusion

During 2011, the whole island of Gyaros and its surrounding marine area up to a radius of 3 Nautical Miles were designated as a Natura 2000 Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation site under the code GR 4220033. The Natura 2000 network aims at ensuring the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats on a European level. The inclusion of an area to the Natura 2000 network does not exclude human activities. Rather it means the adoption of a set of management measures that will ensure the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. The Natura 2000 network was established under the 1992 Habitat Directive (92/43/ECC), and the Birds Directive (2009/147/ECC). In our country, Natura sites are included in the national system of protected areas.

The project CYCLADES LIFE

The project aims at creating the first marine protected area in Cyclades. Its key innovation is that it places at the heart of this initiative the local community: the design, the operation and the management of the wider marine Natura 2000 area of Gyaros, will be realized with the active involvement and participation of the local societies of Syros and Andros.

We hope that respect to the local societies's needs and environmental protection, will make the vision for a sustainable future a reality.

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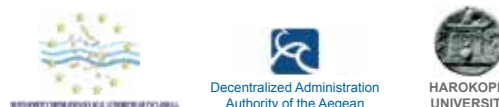
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The CYCLADES LIFE project is implemented by WWF Greece (Coordinator), MOM/Society for the Study and Protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, the Hellenic Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, the Decentralized Administration Authority of the Aegean, the Development Corporation of Local Authorities of Cyclades S.A., the Harokopio University of Athens, and Tethys Research Institute.



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The Island of Gyaros

Harmonious interaction between human activities and nature conservation

In ancient times Gyaros was inhabited and was an autonomous city state. However, during the Roman period, and again more recently from the 1940's to 1974, became a place of exile. From 1974 and until 2000 it was used as a target range by the Hellenic Navy. In 2002, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture formally designated the island as a historical site. Today the island is uninhabited with limited human activities, is public property and is administered by the municipality of Syros.

Unique nature

The island's biodiversity is unique and hosts phrygana, falcons, etc. and it is the only place in Greece where one finds the Gyaros' whip snake *Hierophis viridiflavus*. The small wetland in the eastern part of the island offers shelter for resting and feeding to migratory birds, who although are mere "travellers", enrich the web of life of the island.

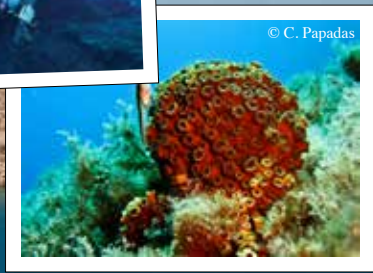
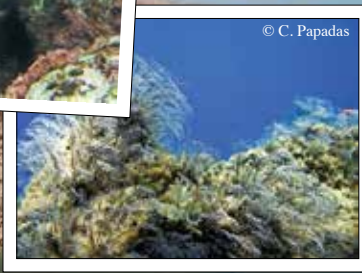
Marine treasures that are in danger

At the island's open beaches, one can see a sight long lost in history: Mediterranean monk seals, the most endangered marine mammal in Europe breeding and feeding its pups in peace, safe from human related threats such as deliberate killings or disturbance from human presence or activities.

The "primordial" and unique, on a Mediterranean level, behaviour of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, renders the local population one of the most important in the whole world.

The marine environment of the island hosts coralligenous formations and Posidonia seagrass beds. Posidonia, which people tend to think is a sea weed, is an extremely important underwater plant. It produces oxygen, protects the sea bed from erosion and like the coralligenous formations provides shelter and breeding grounds for numerous marine organisms.

Mediterranean Monk Seals, coralligenous formations, Posidonia and several hundred other species in the wider marine area of Gyaros form important links in the marine chain of life. It is a chain that is currently threatened by a number of threats such as illegal and uncontrollable fisheries.



An innovative project

The project CYCLADES LIFE aims at protecting the natural environment, in the wider Gyaros area. To achieve this goal, a number of conservation activities and protection measures have to be implemented and sustainable fishing models will be actively promoted.