

# Endangered animals of Greece

## The sea turtle caretta-caretta



An emblematic species of the Greek seas, the Loggerhead is the most common sea turtle species in the Mediterranean, nesting on sandy beaches from Greece and Turkey to Israel and Libya. Many of their nesting beaches are under threat from tourism development.

If they manage to escape their natural enemies as well as human-generated threats and influences, loggerhead sea turtles live for up to 100 years.

During each egg-laying season, turtles lay two to three times. Using their rear flippers, they make their nests about 60 centimeters deep in sandy beaches. Every nest hosts up to 120 eggs and incubation lasts 55 days. The sex of the hatchlings is determined by nest temperature: hot temperatures result in more females, cool temperatures result in more males.

Climate change and loss of nesting beaches are among the top threats to the future of these magnificent ancient mariners in Earth.

Sekania in Zakynthos is the most important nesting beach of the loggerhead turtle in the Mediterranean.

## Mediterranean monk seal – *Monachus monachus*



The latin name «*Monachus monachus*» comes from the word “μοναχός”, in other words monk, because the folds on its neck remind us of the priests’ cassock.

The Mediterranean seal lives in the Aegean and Ionian Sea, in North Africa and in Turkey. Specifically, in the Mediterranean Sea there are only 500 seals left and 300-350 live in Greece. This is because Greece has many kilometres of coast line and a lot of small and big islands with caves. That is why Greece hosts the greatest population of the Mediterranean seal in the world.

The monachus - monachus harem

The male mates with more than one female. This is because the number of females is larger than the number of males. The females have only one baby which they nurse for 3-4 months. They live up to 30 years. They feed on octopuses, lobsters and fish.

The Mediterranean seal is in danger of extinction due to overfishing and illegal fishing. The fishermen are after the seals because they damage their fishnets. Other seals get caught in the nets under the water and drown.

## The Kri Kri goat



The Kri-Kri goat is a feral goat inhabiting the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also called by some other names such as *Agrimi*, *Bezoar goat*, *Cretan goat* or *Cretan Ibex*. The Kri-Kri goat was previously considered a subspecies of wild goats. And now the breed is found only on the island of Crete, Greece and three small islands just offshore. The breed is not thought to be indigenous to Crete. And most likely having been imported to the island during the time of the Minoan civilization. The Kri-Kri goat was once common throughout the Aegean, but the peaks of the 2400 meters White Mountains of Western Crete are their last strongholds.

This mountain range is protected as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and hosts another 14 endemic animal species. Their range extends to the White Mountains, the Samaria National Forest and the islets of Dia, Thodorou, and Agii Pandes in total. And some were introduced onto two more islands recently. The Kri-Kri goat was under threat by the 1960, with a population below 200. Today there are still only about 2000 animals available on the island and they are considered vulnerable. Excessive hunting for their tender meat, scarcer grazing grounds and diseases are the main reasons for decreasing

their numbers. Hybridization is also a threat, because the Kri-Kri goat population has interbred with ordinary goats. Today hunting them is strictly prohibited.

## Milos viper



It lives in holes in the ground, in dry-stone fences, in bushes and in bush-wood. It has a cylindrical body that can reach up to two meters in length.

It can easily be recognized by its characteristic **head**, which is flat, triangular, narrow towards the front, and widening sharply towards the back like a heart and covered in hard, shiny scales. The **tongue** is long, dark and forked. When disturbed it darts out its tongue nervously, hisses and is ready to bite.

In the upper jaw there is a pair of teeth, which at the base are connected to venom-glands. These are emptied when the viper bites.

The **venom** is potent and dangerous. It acts directly on the nervous system and affects the spinal cord. The effect of the venom depends on the viper's age, size

and the quantity of the venom. If the glands have recently been emptied the injected dosage is almost ineffective.

The **color** varies from grey to brown, olive-green or red, depending on its habitat - that is to say according to protectional needs imposed by the environment. This is why one might accidentally step on it without seeing it first. The most beautiful and characteristic Milos Viper is beyond any doubt the red viper.

It **feeds** on live lizards, worms, snails, mice and rats. It eats them whole - which is why you may see it with a strangely inflated stomach at times - and it digests its prey little by little, taking a long time to do so. Collectors nowadays feed it only one frozen rat a month.

During winter it **hibernates**. It wakes up in spring and begins its active, reproductive cycle. **Gestation** lasts 8 months. It lays eggs which immediately hatch.

### **An endangered species**

The greatest danger it faces today comes from **vehicles**. And as has always been the case it is being killed in agricultural areas, especially the irrigated ones, because it prefers shade and humidity.

Most suffer from the **destruction of their natural habitat**, mainly caused by deforestation due to agricultural expansion, mining activities and fires.