



Pup captured in gillnet is released at Costa de las Focas Reserve

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"Costa de las Focas" Marine and coastal Reserve was created in 2001 by CBD-Habitat Foundation with the support of local fishermen and regional authorities with the objective of protecting the breeding caves of the last Mediterranean monk seal colony in the world, located in the Cabo Blanco peninsula (Mauritania). Since then, every single day, the surveillance team is present to avoid the setting of fishing gears and the presence of goose barnacle pickers and other sources of threat and disturbance in the breeding caves and vicinities. Thanks to this conservation efforts, the monk seal colony has now more than 220 animals, and annual pup production is three times higher. Nevertheless, the situation of the colony is still very fragile and the need to maintain the reserve is as important as the first day. As a clear example, the 27th of September, a fishing pirogue coming from the nearby city of Nouadhibou settled several gillnets in front of one of the breeding caves inside the reserve. The fishing gear was detected by the surveillance team but sea conditions didn't allow to the marine patrol to go to the sea to recover them. The day after, a seal was observed for a long period of time surfacing in the same place, seeming captured by the fishing gear. The sea conditions were still rough enough to avoid the marine patrol to act. Finally and despite of bad sea conditions, the 29th the reserve patrol could go to the sea to remove the fishing gears and to release the captured seal, a young male pup of 3 months of age that managed to survive at least 24 hours captured in the net. Fortunately, the pup is perfectly well with not even a wound. Sadly, the same fishing gear had also captured a juvenile female seal that couldn't managed to survive and that died drowned entangled.

This sad fact demonstrates once again the fragility of the monk seal colony facing human threats, mainly interactions with fisheries, and the need to maintain and reinforce the conservation measures on the last surviving monk seal populations along the world.