

REMARKS ON THE REINTRODUCTION OF GREY SEALS AND COMMON SEALS  
ALONG THE FRENCH COAST.

*R. Duguay and D. Prieur, Centre d'Etude des Mammifères Marin, 17000 La Rochelle, France.*

In former times colonies of three species of seals could be found along the coasts of France: the Monk seal (*Monachus monachus*), the Common seal (*Phoca vitulina*) and the Grey seal (*Hali-choerus grypus*). The first has disappeared totally from the Mediterranean coast of France where it used to be, without any hope of return while the survival of this species is so threatened.

The Common seal as well as the Grey seal are still found each year but only in very small numbers. Annual checking by the "Centre d'Etude des Mammifères Marins" since 1972 showed that nearly all these seals are very young ones, coming from colonies on the English coast, which for the Common seal must be the Wash.

Examination of the status of the Common seal has shown that the only colony at the moment is to be found in the bay of Somme, but the number has declined rapidly after the middle of the 19th century, and since 1930 no reproduction has been observed (Duguay, 1978).

The Grey seal has been well known along the coast of Brittany for a very long time, but reproduction is going to fail as well. The only thing to be said at this moment is that there is no population present capable of producing pups (Prieur, 1978).

Therefore we thought about reintroduction of these two species at their original reproduction sites, where there is now a better guarantee for protection since the decision of the Minister of Environmental Affairs and of the "Cadre de Vie" on seal protection.

The first idea was to reintroduce some groups of seals obtained from colonies on the English coast. This was not possible because such an operation would be far too expensive and because of the uncertainty of keeping the reintroduced animals at the point of release. Therefore it seemed preferable to release young seals found isolated at different points on the French coast. All information about young seals washed up on the beach is gathered by the "Centre d'Etude des Mammifères Marins", so we were immediately notified when animals were found. However, the problem remained how to keep the animals for a few days for a veterinary survey before releasing them. We found this possible thanks to the help of: la Société Protectrice des Animaux à Dunkerque et Calais, the Zoo of Amiens, the Zoo of La Palmyre (near La Rochelle) and Musée de la Mer at Biarritz.

For Brittany it has been necessary to build a centre with a pool in order to avoid transport of the seals to one of the too distant centres. The seals are released in the "secteur d'Ouessant", using a boat, so this can only be done under good weather conditions. This means that the animals must be kept in captivity sometimes for a few days, to be released as soon as possible.

In this way we obtained 13 living animals in 1979 and the beginning of 1980. Two Common seals and 4 Grey seals were released after a short period. The tags we used were kindly presented by the Sea Mammal Research Unit at Cambridge.

The results showed that the chances of survival were about 50%, which is not surprising when compared with the average natural juvenile mortality. It must also be appreciated that the young seals were often found in a rather bad condition, caused by their long journey just after weaning. Several seals were wounded while they came ashore, mostly during bad weather.

Anyhow, it seems that this sort of operation, with help from the W.W.F., is at the moment the best solution for the young seals themselves, and also in trying to establish new seal colonies where they used to be previously.

Date and locality of capture	sex	length cm	weight kg	nursing centre	end of nursing period
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>					
24.1.79 Dunkerque (Nord)	?	96	?	S.P.A. Dunkerque	Released at Dunkerque (Nord) 4.2.79
18.4.79 Cailais (P.d.C.)	?	100	19.7	S.P.A. Calais	Released at Bay de Somme 16.5.79 Tag: London Zoo 22072
*25.11.79 Dunkerque (Nord)	♀	96	12.5	S.P.A. Dunkerque	Died 4.12.79
*) 15.1.80 Dunkerque (Nord)	♀	90	16.5	S.P.A. Dunkerque	Died 16.1.80
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>					
* 14.1.79 Biarritz (Pyr. Atl.)	♀	147	61	Musée d/1 Mer Biarritz	Died 18.1.79
18.1.79 Dunkerque (Nord)	?	112	?	S.P.A. Dunkerque	Released at Dunkerque (Nord) 21.1.79
4.9.79 Veulettes (S.Mar.)	♀	95	11	Zoo Amiens (Somme)	Died 16.9.79
22.11.79 Plouguerneau (Fin.)	♀	102	20	Fac. d. Science Brest (Finist.)	Died 23.11.79
* 12.12.79 Douarnez (Fin.)	♀	83	12.3	Zoo la Palmyre (Char. Mar.)	Died 22.12.79
19.12.79 Kerroc'h (Morb.)	♀	102	?	Zoo la Palmyre (Char. Mar.)	Released in archipelago of Moléne (Fin.) 26.1.80 Tag: London Zoo 21988
24.12.79 Vieux Boucau (Land.)	♂	100	13.5	Musée d/1 Mer Biarritz	Died 25.12.79
4.1.80 L'Ile d'Yeu (Vend.)	♂	110	18	Zoo la Palmyre (Char. Mar.)	Released in archipelago of Moléne (Fin.) 26.1.80 Tag: London Zoo 21990
5.1.80 Plouguerneau (Fin.)	♂	110	?	Fac. d. Sciences Brest (Finist.)	Released in archipelago of Moléne (Fin.) 26.1.80 Tag: London Zoo 21989

\* Parts of these specimens are preserved in the Museum at la Rochelle.

### References

- DUGUY, R., 1978. Statut passé et actuel du Phoque veau-marin (*Phoca vitulina*, Linnaeus, 1758) sur les côtes de France. C.I.E.M., Copenhagen, 9p.
- PRIEUR, D. and R. DUGUY, 1978. Le statut du Phoque gris (*Halichoerus grypus*) en France. C.I.E.M., Copenhagen, 5p.