

Protected species and habitat types of the sublittoral zone of Gyaros island, Aegean Sea.

Issaris Y.^{1,2,4}, Salomidi M.^{3,4}, Katsanevakis S.^{1,4}, Samara E.⁴, Mantzavrakos E.⁴, Dimitropoulou D.⁴, Efthimiou Ch.⁴, Kanellakis G.⁴, Kontaratos N.⁴, Koundouris V.⁴, Kypraios G.⁴, Makropoulou Z.⁴, Milonakis K.⁴, Mpazioti E.⁴, Papadogiannakis M.⁴, Rousounelos Y.⁴, Thrasyvoulides A.⁴ & Vilanakis F.⁴

¹ Institute of Marine Biological Resources, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, Agios Kosmas, Greece

² Section of Zoology-Marine Biology, Department of Biology, University of Athens, Athens, Greece

³ Institute of Oceanography, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, Anavyssos, Greece

⁴ Hellenic Association of Recreational Scuba Divers "Tethys", Alimos, Greece

Under the scope of declaring the island of Gyaros a Marine Reserve, a preliminary underwater survey was conducted in order to identify and record the presence of marine habitat types and species protected by National Laws and International Conventions. 16 transects perpendicular to the shore were visually censused at depths between 0-30m. The survey was conducted by volunteer scuba divers - members of the Hellenic Association of Recreational Divers "Tethys", with the support of the Hellenic Office of Greenpeace NGO. Extended underwater prairies of *Posidonia oceanica* (Natura priority habitat type 1120) were recorded at all transects and depths surveyed. Among them, reefs (Natura habitat type 1170 - Biocenosis of sublittoral algae and Coralligenous) and sandbanks (Natura habitat type 1110) were also present at various depths. Large densities of the bivalve mollusk *Pinna nobilis* were observed at 90% of the transects surveyed, while at different sites, sponges *Axinella* spp., sea urchins *Centrostephanus longispinus*, trumpet tritons *Charonia tritonis* and the parrotfish *Sparisoma cretense* were occasionally recorded and photographed. We should note that the invasive green algae *Caulerpa racemosa* had covered large areas at all depths and among all habitat types. In general, the variety of habitat types, the presence of *Posidonia oceanica* beds in good condition (EU priority habitat) and the abundance of protected species indicate Gyaros island's high potential to effectively act as a Marine Reserve.