



Monitoring of the Caspian Seal (*Pusa capsica*) in Turkmenistan, January – October, 2022

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Between early January and late October 2022, the Khazarskiy State Nature Reserve organized several scientific expeditions in the Turkmenistan area of the Caspian Sea. The research work was conducted by S. Mammedov, Head of Scientific Department, Y. Ashirov, Head of Security Department from the Khazarskiy State Natural Reserve, and employees of the Ogurchinskiy Sanctuary: S. Nurmammedov, Head of the Sanctuary, and R. Amanmammedov, an operator.

One of the research objectives was to survey the Caspian seal in the Khazarskiy State Nature Reserve (the Khazarskiy and Esenguliyskiy sectors, the Ogurchinsky Sanctuary). Expeditionary routes included Bolshoy Osushnoy Island and Malyy Osushnoy Island in the Turkmenbashi Bay, as well as the Yuzhnaya Chelekenskaya Spit, Mikhailova Island and Ogurjaly (former Ogurchinskiy) Island in the Turkmen Bay (Fig. 1), where the Caspian seal haul outs were most often registered in 2016-2021 (Rustamov et al., 2021).



Fig. 1. Locations of registered encounters with Caspian seals in the Turkmenistan area of the Caspian Sea, April – June, 2022: I – Bolshoy Osushnoy and Malyy Osushnoy islands; II – Mikhailova Island; III – Ogurjaly Island; black marks indicate locations of the registered encounters with Caspian seals.

From the beginning of January to the end of March, 2022, the expedition members did not encounter Caspian seals in the monitoring areas. The first seal was recorded on the northeastern spit of Ogurjaly Island on April 04 (Table 1).

Table 1. The results of registered encounters with Caspian seals in the Turkmenistan sector of the Caspian Sea, April-June 2022

№	Location of registered encounters with Caspian seals	Date of registration	Number of adult seals	Number of juvenile seals	Total
1	Northeastern spit, Ogurjaly Island	04.04.2022	-	1	1
2	Southern area of Ogurjaly Island	08.04.2022	-	1	1
3	Northwestern coast of Ogurjaly Island	10.04.2022	-	1	1
4	Southern area of Ogurjaly Island	18.04.2022	7	3	10
5	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	22.04.2022	1	-	1
6	Yuzhnaya Chelekenskaya Spit, Chelekenskiy Peninsula	01.05.2022	4	-	4
7	Southern area of Ogurjaly Island	03.05.2022	3	-	3
8	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	05.05.2022	7	-	7
9	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	28.05.2022	7	2	9
10	Mikhailova Island	13.06.2022	1	-	1
11	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	16.06.2022	8	-	8
12	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	22.06.2022	1	1	2
13	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	24.06.2022	2	1	3
14	Southern spit, Ogurjaly Island	26.06.2022	3	1	4
Total			44	11	55

14 Caspian seals (8 adults and 6 juveniles) were registered by April's expeditions on Ogurjaly Island and its northwestern spit. The only haul-out of 10 individuals was found in the southern area of Ogurjaly Island on April 18. In April, on the northeastern spit and in the southern area of Ogurjaly Island, we found two weakened young seals (Fig. 2), one of them, suffering from a few injuries, was severely exhausted (Fig. 2. B).

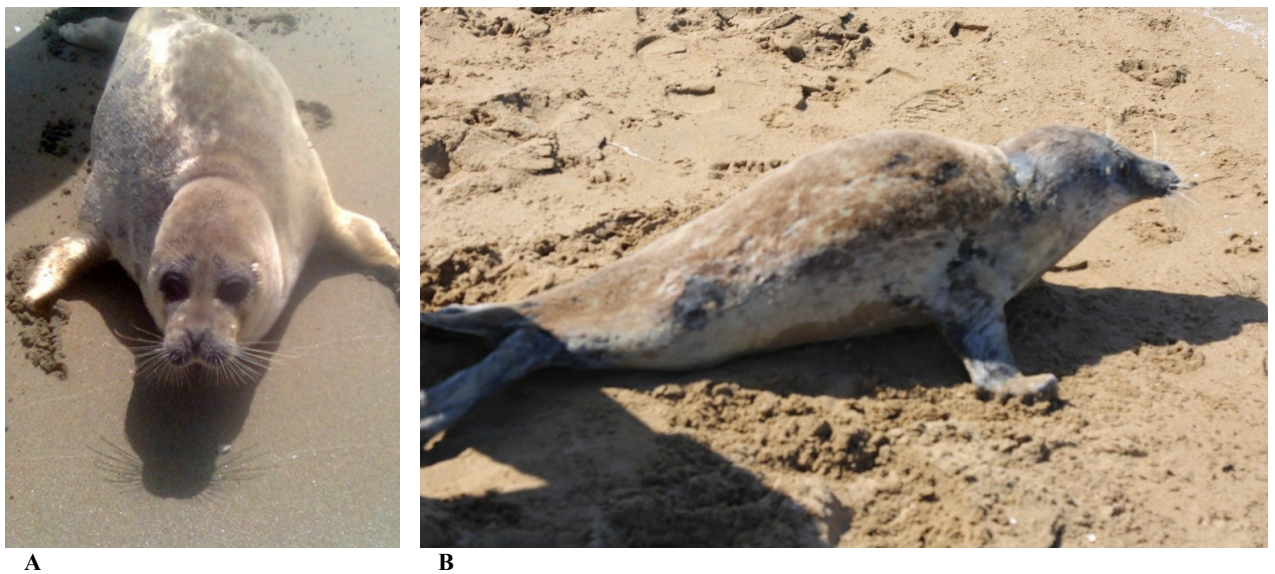


Fig. 2. Juvenile Caspian seals: A - a weakened seal, the northeastern spit of Ogurjaly Island, 04.04.2022; B – an exhausted seal suffering from a few injuries, the southern area of Ogurjaly Island, 04.18;2022. Photos: S.B. Mammedov.

In May, 23 seals (21 adults and 2 juveniles) were encountered on the Yuzhnaya Chelekenskaya Spit (the Cheleken Peninsula), in the southern area of Ogurjaly Island and on its southern spit. The maximum number of seals (9 individuals) was recorded on the southern spit of Ogurjaly on the 28th of May.

In June, the expedition registered 18 Caspian seals (15 adults and 3 juveniles); 1 seal was on Mikhailova Island, the rest - on the southern spit of Ogurjaly. The maximum number of seals (8 individuals) was encountered on the southern spit of Ogurjaly on the 16th of June.



Fig. 3. A Caspian seal is near the southern spit of Ogurjaly Island, 06.26.2022. Photo: S.B. Mammedov.

From the beginning of July to the end of October, 2022, no Caspian seals were encountered in the monitoring areas.

In total, 55 seals (44 adults and 11 juvenile animals) were encountered in the Turkmenistan area of the Caspian Sea in January - October, 2022.

References

E.A. Rustamov, A.A. Sherbina, A.V. Belousova, S.B. Mammedov (2021) The status of the Caspian seal in the Turkmen sector of the Caspian Sea, 2012-2021. In: Topical Issues of Zoology, Ecology and Nature Conservation. Issue 3. Proceedings of the Third International Scientific and Practical Conference on World Earth Day and the Launch of the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, April 22, 2021, pp. 133-137.