

A rare, endangered seal named Yulia basks on Tel Aviv beach

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Yulia, an endangered Mediterranean monk seal rests on the beach in Tel Aviv, Israel, Tuesday, May 16, 2023. An unexpected visitor spotted sunbathing on a beach in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv is turning heads and causing a media buzz. The seal cow first appeared south of Tel Aviv's main beachfront last Friday, drawing clusters of curious onlookers to the rocky beach south of Jaffa's historic center on Tuesday. Credit: AP Photo/Ariel Schalit

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But it's not American film director and Tel Aviv mainstay, Quentin Tarantino, or another Hollywood celebrity—it's Yulia, an endangered Mediterranean monk seal.

The seal cow first appeared south of Tel Aviv's main beachfront last Friday. On Tuesday, Yulia drew clusters of curious onlookers to the rocky beach south of Jaffa's historic center.

These [seals](#) are listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with as few as 350 mature specimens estimated to exist in the wild. Its populations have dwindled due to historic seal hunting, fishing, and habitat destruction.

Rarely spotted on Israel's shores, the dwindling Mediterranean monk seal populations are believed to survive only in a handful of places in the Mediterranean Sea.

Israel's Nature and Park Authority has fenced off the section of beach where Yulia has come ashore to rest, and dispatched volunteers to monitor her from a distance.

Still, her appearance is a sensation.

"This is a very rare event that a monk seal stays for such a long time on the shore," said Aviad Scheinin, a [marine biologist](#) from University of Haifa.



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Yulia is molting, a multi-day process of shedding her winter coat, he explained, during which time she has been resting on the shore and taken occasional excursions out to sea.

Scheinin said fellow researchers from around the eastern Mediterranean have identified Yulia as previously spotted in Turkey and Lebanon in recent years. She is estimated to be around 20 years old.

"I'm researching marine mammals for 20 years; this is the first time that I'm actually seeing such a thing, and I can hardly sleep at night because of that," he said.

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