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NEWS FROM THE ACCOBAMS PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

After the Meeting of the Parties (MOP5) organized in Tangiers (Morocco) in November 2013 where a new work program was adopted for 2014-2016 and following the entry on duty on the 1st of January of the new Executive Secretary Ms. Florence Descroix-Comanducci, the challenges of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat were clearly set.

Several workshops and meetings were organized in 2014 and some key activities were undertaken.

Workshops

A **workshop on “The Impact of Climate Change on Cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Seas”** was held in Monaco on 11th June 2014 in response to the agreement by the ACCOBAMS Parties that necessary actions to reduce anthropogenic contributions to climate change and marine acidification have to be taken. It was attended by experts from eight countries from across the ACCOBAMS region and beyond, by representatives from a number of international organisations and by members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.

Discussion led to the identification of the need to build better synergies between various research efforts and international bodies, and the identification of particular knowledge gaps, including a lack of basic knowledge about cetacean populations which is especially pronounced in some areas. The importance of the maintenance of long-term studies was emphasised along with the value of cetaceans as sentinels of ecosystem health and indicators of climate change.



The **first workshop for ACCOBAMS Partners** was organized on 17th April 2014, at the occasion of the 9th Meeting of the Scientific Committee. At this occasion, ACCOBAMS Partners expressed their views regarding the ACCOBAMS Partnership: its main strengths but its difficulties too. Partners explored options for a further and a better way of communicating with one another but also with all the ACCOBAMS actors (Focal Points, Permanent Secretariat, Scientific Committee...).

The discussion led to the identification of new ways to communicate by using the new ACCOBAMS Network and by creating a Facebook page on which Partners will be able to exchange information to build better synergies/collaborations in order to contribute to the implementation of activities described in the ACCOBAMS Working Programme.



A **workshop on “Cetacean live stranding”** was held in Monaco on the 29th and 30th of October 2014. More than 40 experts from 11 Countries of the ACCOBAMS Area, as well as a representative of the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS Working Group on noise, participated. Elements for a transboundary common procedure were identified for the Pelagos Sanctuary in order to facilitate response to emergency transboundary situations in this area. That included common definitions, a common alert system based on codes and capacity building. Carcasses of cetaceans stranded dead or at sea are potential health, pollution and navigation dangers. Therefore, it was proposed that part of the management of cetacean stranding events be inserted in an existing transboundary operational plan (RAMOGEPOL for example) in order to facilitate the information transfer and the pooled use of the human, technical and financial resources.

Experts from areas beyond the Pelagos Sanctuary were also invited to propose elements for the establishment of a harmonized Procedure in case of cetaceans live stranding for all the Parties to ACCOBAMS. One of their main proposals would be to encourage national and regional cooperation between all stakeholders involved in such events.

Meetings and Conferences

The **9th meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC9)** was convened in Monaco from the 15th to the 17th April 2014. It was attended by Members of the Scientific Committee and Representatives from International Organizations and Observers including the ACCOBAMS Partners. It was the first meeting with the new composition of experts from both the CIESM and the IUCN as decided by the 5th ACCOBAMS Meeting of Parties.

The Scientific Committee nominated Simone Panigada as Chair and Renaud de Stephanis as Vice Chair of the Scientific Committee. The following Task Managers were appointed according to the priorities of the Working Program:

- Cetacean population estimates (including Basin wide survey): Simone Panigada;
- Interaction with fisheries: Renaud de Stephanis;
- Conservation of cetaceans critical habitats: Léa David;
- Capacity Building (including public awareness and communication): Ayaka Amaha Oztürk.



The **9th meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau** was held in Paris on 9th and 10th of December 2014. A program of activities for the Secretariat was approved for 2015 and a call for voluntary contributions by Countries and by Partners to support the implementation of some of them will be done by the Secretariat.

An **“operational Scientific Committee Meeting”** was organized in the Secretariat premises on 19th December 2014 with the 4 Task Managers (including Chair and Vice Chair) and representatives from ECS, IUCN and IWC. The objective of such a Meeting was to draw a road map, to assign specific tasks and to facilitate the effective implementation of the work-plan between now and the next Scientific Committee Meeting planned for the week of 19th October 2015.



The **Third Biennial Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries (CSMC3)** was organized in Jounieh (Lebanon) from 21 to 23 October 2014 thanks to the kind support from the relevant Lebanese Authorities (CNRS and its Research Centre in Jounieh) as well as from the Principality of Monaco. It was attended by scientists from seven South Mediterranean Countries as well as Scientists from other Parties to ACCOBAMS and representatives of the relevant regional organisations. The Conference offered the opportunity to update participants on the significant scientific works on cetaceans undertaken during the last years in the South of the Mediterranean. It also offered the opportunity to the participating scientists to exchange and to build collaboration initiatives.

NEWS FROM THE RAC/SPA

Improved governance on the high seas in the Mediterranean region

Since 2008, RAC-SPA under the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been implementing the "MedOpenSeas" project to identify and establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the open seas, including the deep seas. The primary objective of this project is to promote the establishment of a representative ecological network of MPAs in the Mediterranean within the framework of SPA/BD Protocol on the establishment of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs). This project is financially supported by the European Commission, and is now in its third phase.

The first phase of the project, completed in late 2009, led to the identification of twelve priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep seas, which were agreed upon by the Extraordinary Meeting of the Focal Points for SPAs (Istanbul, Turkey, 1st June 2010). Each of these priority areas, including the Sicily channel/Tunisian plateau, could become a candidate for SPAMI listing in their total or partial extension.

The aim of the project's second phase, completed in early 2012, was to start supporting neighbouring Parties of the above-mentioned priority areas in evaluating and potentially presenting these sites as candidate(s) for inclusion in the SPAMI List, in accordance with the provisions of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. The RAC/SPA has been facilitating this preparatory work, including stakeholder negotiations, for

the areas of Alboran Sea and Gulf of Lions. The programme of work of the second phase included definitions for the establishment of ad hoc working groups, composed of representatives from the countries bordering the areas.

Regarding the current third phase, RAC/SPA presented more precisely the practical details on the project's approach for the open sea areas in the Sicily channel/Tunisian plateau, Alboran Sea and Adriatic Sea, with a view to preparing the presentation report for the sites in this areas that could be candidates for the SPAMI List. Operational criteria had been developed by RAC/SPA during the first phase to select sites, in line with the different approaches applicable to the region (UNEP/MAP SPAMIs, CBD EBSAs, FAO Vulnerable areas, GFCM FRAs, others).

Article by Lobna BEN NAKHLA & Daniel CEBRIÁN MENCHERO

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CMS COP11 RELATED TO CETACEANS

The 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP11) was held in Quito, Ecuador, from 4-9 November 2014. After a week of intense deliberations and negotiations, the Parties to CMS passed a large number of resolutions, taking bold steps forward for the conservation of marine, terrestrial and avian migratory species.

Several resolutions focusing on institutional and strategic matters were adopted, such as the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023, Enhancing Synergies, Common Services among CMS Family Instruments, Restructuring the Scientific Council, Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Convention through a Process to Review Implementation and Enhancing the Relationship between the CMS Family and Civil Society. Others addressing cross-cutting conservation issues include matters very relevant for cetacean conservation globally such as the Programme of Work on Climate Change and Migratory Species, Renewable Energy and Migratory Species, Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching and Management of Marine Debris.

Widely called the "Shark COP", Parties listed a total of 21 shark and ray species, in addition to a resolution on Conservation of Migratory Sharks and Rays. In addition, 1 other fish species, 5 bird species, 2 terrestrial mammals and 2 aquatic mammals, the Mediterranean population of Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) and the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*), were added to Appendices I and/or II of the Convention.

Two resolutions are specifically on cetaceans:

Live Captures of Cetaceans from the Wild for Commercial Purposes

Capture of small cetaceans for public display in commercial aquaria and travelling shows continues in a number of countries. This resolution calls on Parties to develop and implement national legislation prohibiting the live capture of cetaceans from the wild for commercial purposes, and to review their regulations regarding import and international transit of live cetaceans, bearing in mind the aim to actively discourage new live captures from the wild for commercial purposes globally.

Conservation Implications of Cetacean Culture

Through this resolution, Parties recognize that a number of socially complex mammalian species, such as several species of cetaceans, great apes and elephants, show evidence of having non-human culture and that this has implications for the efforts to conserve them. Parties are urged to consider culturally transmitted behaviours when determining conservation measures for such species, and to apply a precautionary approach to the management of populations for which there is evidence that culture and social complexity may be a conservation issue.

Article by Heidrun FRISCH

NEWS FROM THE BLACK SEA COMMISSION

In accordance with the provisions of the relevant Memorandum of Understanding between the Black Sea Commission and ACCOBAMS, the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission (BSC) exercises its role of the Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS in regards to the conservation of the cetaceans of the Black Sea. Further on, (1) the Black Sea Commission and ACCOBAMS are observers to each other since 2001; (2) the first MoU between Secretariats was signed in 2002 and later revised in November, 2012; (3) the BSC PS was assigned to be the Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS and a Work Plan with the detailed list of activities was annexed to the MoU.

At the moment the parties revise the Annex to the MoU for the activities for 2015/2016 to be adopted during upcoming 30th BSC Regular Meeting in November, 2014.

Four countries out of 6 in the Black Sea basin are members to the ACCOBAMS Agreement. The ratification of ACCOBAMS Agreement by the Republic of Turkey is on the final stage and Turkey is expected to become an ACCOBAMS member shortly.

Conservation of cetaceans is one of the issues of concern in Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS SAP 2009) and a Black Sea CBD Protocol. Currently the BSC PS is working on drafting the First Report on the Implementation of the BS SAP (2009) and State of the Black Sea Environment (SoE) to be produced every five years, where the relevant information on the conservation of cetaceans will be presented. Reports would produce the Recommendations for decision-makers, including amendments to the existing BS SAP and will take on board the recent activities and trends regarding cetaceans' conservation.

The relevant provisions of BS SAP (2009) on the measures which were supposed to be taken by countries since 2009 are the following: ban on the hunting of marine

mammals to be enforced; regular population assessments of marine mammals; the Centre for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in Batumi, Georgia, to be provided with the necessary equipment in order to function as a regional rehabilitation centre for captive marine mammals; national centres and sanctuaries for the rehabilitation of marine mammals to be strengthened; consideration to be given to modify fishing practices in order to avoid catching marine mammals, as by-catch, recommended that the Black Sea Commission would develop a strategy for the reduction of by-catches of marine mammals etc.

One of six Advisory Groups of the Black Sea Commission, namely the Advisory Group on the Environmental Aspects of the Management of Fisheries and other Marine Living Resources (FOMLR), deals with cetaceans' conservation. Its last 17th Meeting, traditionally held back-to-back with Workshop on Black Sea Cetaceans' Protection/Conservation, took place on 13th October, 2014 in Istanbul, Turkey.

During the meeting the representatives of the countries reported on the activities implemented during the previous year for cetaceans' protection and considered the following issues:

1. Cetaceans' survey for the entire Black Sea – with the support of ACCOBAMS and/or other sources;
2. Identification of the fishing methods/techniques with minimum impact on cetacean's populations;
3. Amendments to the fisheries component of the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program (BSIMAP) for years 2015-2020 to be adopted by the BSC at upcoming 30th BSC Regular Meeting. The FOMLR Advisory Group proposed to the BSC to introduce into the draft BSIMAP the item "Specimens of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins kept in the captivity" in line with «Draft roadmap for the assessment and inventory of specimens of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins kept in the captivity» elaborated between the BSC and ACCOBAMS Secretariats;
4. Revision of Conservation Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans for 2014-2018 (based on the existing Conservation plan developed for 2006-2010) and Draft Road Map for assessment of bottlenose dolphins. The FOMLR considered the draft Conservation Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans for 2014-2018 and recommended it for the adoption of the BSC. The BSC PS would like to thank the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the Secretariat for their support in establishing the team to produce the draft Conservation Plan and financial support to the experts involved;
5. FOMLR Advisory Group supported the intent of the BSC, GFCM and ACCOBAMS secretariats to work together on a joint initiative/project supporting the implementation of the bilateral MoUs concluded between them.

Article by Irina MAKARENKO





THE ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE a historical project on the way of coming true

The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) is an ambitious and exciting project aimed at providing essential information for supporting the implementation of ACCOBAMS. This basin-wide systematic survey should be carried out across the whole Agreement area, all at once during the summer, to collect data on the abundance of cetaceans and their geographical distribution and habitat preferences. The study would combine visual survey methods (by boat and by air) and acoustic detection techniques.

ACCOBAMS has been working on the development of this project since more than 10 years, and more particularly on the scientific design of the project and on the methodologies and protocols to be used. The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee established many recommendations and Parties to ACCOBAMS adopted several Resolutions stressing the priority of this project for achieving ACCOBAMS objectives.

In 2014, in the framework of an Agreement established between the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the IUCN Center for Mediterranean Cooperation, the Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas and the French MPA Agency, and thanks to a financial support from the French MPA Agency, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been able to recruit a skilled expert to develop the project documents and to raise funds.

In order to ensure ownership of the project by the countries of the region, a consultation process was also launched by the Secretariat through the establishment of a contact group consisting of country representatives and of the "Survey" task manager* of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee. This contact group aims at providing information required for developing the project, following the different steps of the preparation of the project documents and fundraising actions.

As a result of the consultation stage, it appeared that the development of the project should be considered in relation with other regional initiatives aiming at establishing programs for the monitoring of the marine environment, e.g. the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Ecosystem Approach process of the Barcelona Convention.

The next months will be challenging for the ASI: project documents to be prepared and circulated for review, appropriate funding to be identified, the political will of the countries to be put into action, and this can only be achieved through the active involvement and the full support of the entire ACCOBAMS community!

* The task manager on Cetacean population estimates (Basin wide survey), M. Simone Panigada.



"HIGH QUALITY WHALE WATCHING" CERTIFICATE IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

Cetacean watching activities for commercial purposes are increasingly being developed in the ACCOBAMS area, most of the time in the absence of management rules to mitigate harassment and other adverse impacts on cetaceans. Considering that these activities, where properly conducted, should be encouraged as they do contribute to the building of education and awareness on cetaceans, Parties to ACCOBAMS decided through the Resolution 5.10 to adopt the logo "High Quality Whale Watching".

The "High Quality Whale Watching" certificate aims at encouraging the implementation of good practices and sustainable know-how by the whale watching operators.

As decided in the Resolution 5.10, ACCOBAMS Parties are encouraged to adopt national rules in order to implement the certificate in the relevant bodies at national level. In order to give the choice to the Parties when facing juridical difficulties regarding the implementation of the Certificate (such as France), the ACCOBAMS Bureau was in favor of the implementation of a private certificate as an alternative process to a public label.

In the case of the implementation of the private certificate, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat may authorize a private organization (only among those already having the ACCOBAMS Partner status) to use the certificate upon conditions of compliance with the terms contained in an Agreement of "High Quality Whale Watching Partner" (HQWWP) to be established between the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the organization.

The first HQWWP Agreement established with a private organization was signed in July 2014 between the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat and the French NGO "Souffleurs d'Ecume" which is now authorized to use and deliver the certificate for the French Mediterranean Sea, upon conditions of compliance with the terms contained in the Convention (including the ACCOBAMS/Pelagos code of conduct).

The "High Quality Whale Watching" certificate can be requested by any whale watching operator who will have to undertake a training program aiming at:

- giving added value to the concerned operators' trips;
- promoting quality service and an ecologically sensible approach with the public;
- restricting the impacts of the activity on cetaceans and helping protect them;
- thus ensuring that whale watching has a sustainable future.

In addition, the beneficiary will ensure that each trip is guided by at least one trained person.



The "High Quality Whale Watching" certificate was officially registered at the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat on the 4th of September 2014, as a collective mark with its logo and the regulations governing its use.

SUMMARY OF THE ACCOBAMS WORKSHOP ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We live on a rapidly changing planet. The speed of change is greater than anything that existing life forms have experienced and this is a challenge to them (as it is to us). Sadly the Mediterranean and Black Seas are globally amongst the ecosystems most likely to be rapidly impacted, leading to further biodiversity loss and, in order to better understand this, ACCOBAMS recently hosted a workshop on 'The Impact of Climate Change on Cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Sea'. This met on 11th June 2014 and was hosted by the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and part-sponsored by the Humane Society International. Seventeen experts from eight countries from across the ACCOBAMS region and beyond attended, including representatives from a number of international organisations and members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.

The workshop considered the latest pronouncements from the International Panel on Climate Change, noting that related ecosystems change has already been identified in the ACCOBAMS region. The workshop received a number of detailed reports of ongoing research in the region and pertinent investigations being conducted elsewhere. In addition, the work proposed on climate change under the auspices of the Convention for Migratory Species was considered and the workshop expressed its appreciation and support for these plans.

Discussion led to the identification of the need to build better synergies between various research efforts and international bodies, and the identification of particular knowledge gaps, including a lack of basic knowledge about cetacean populations which is especially pronounced in some areas. The importance of the maintenance of long-term studies was emphasised along with the value of cetaceans as sentinels of ecosystem health and indicators of climate change.

The workshop concluded that 'whilst gaps remain in our knowledge, there is evidence that climate change, especially in combination with other pressures, presents a profound threat to cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS region'. The full recommendations can be found on the ACCOBAMS website and also included the need to give more attention to the effects of climate change in the marine environment and the value that cetaceans have as sentinels of the ecosystem effects of climate change.

Article by Mark Peter SIMMONDS

Full Report available [here](#)

THIRD BIENNIAL CONFERENCE ON CETACEAN CONSERVATION IN SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

The objective of the **Biennial Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries (CSMC)** is to assess the available knowledge on cetaceans in the South of the Mediterranean, to identify gaps and stimulate the development of conservation actions in order to promote the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Agreement. The Conference provides an opportunity to the cetacean specialists, active in the South of the Mediterranean, to exchange their experience and their data and to discuss the best approaches and priority actions for a better knowledge of cetacean populations in this region where data still remain sporadic and scarce. This Conference also aims at involving the student community and at rising awareness of managers and stakeholders on marine issues.

The CSMC3 has been organized in **Jounieh (Lebanon)** from **21 to 23 October 2014**, in collaboration with the National Centre for Marine Sciences of CNRS (Lebanon), the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA -MAP-UNEP) and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation. CSMC3 was financially supported by a voluntary contribution from the Principality of Monaco.

More than 40 participants from 10 Mediterranean Countries (Algeria, Egypt, France, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Monaco, Morocco, Tunisia and Syria) and from 5 International Organisations (ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN, MedPAN, RAC/SPA) attended the Conference.

The scientific papers presented during the Conference showed a significant progress in the scientific knowledge regarding cetaceans in the Southern Mediterranean countries. They also showed that scientific teams were in place, working on issues of interest for cetacean conservation.

The Conclusions and Recommendations that emerged from the discussions and from the round table will be useful to:

- Identify priorities in research programs in the Southern Mediterranean countries;
- Give guidance to scientists in the region, and to national authorities, for their activities related to the implementation of ACCOBAMS.

The 20 Recommendations developed aim at:

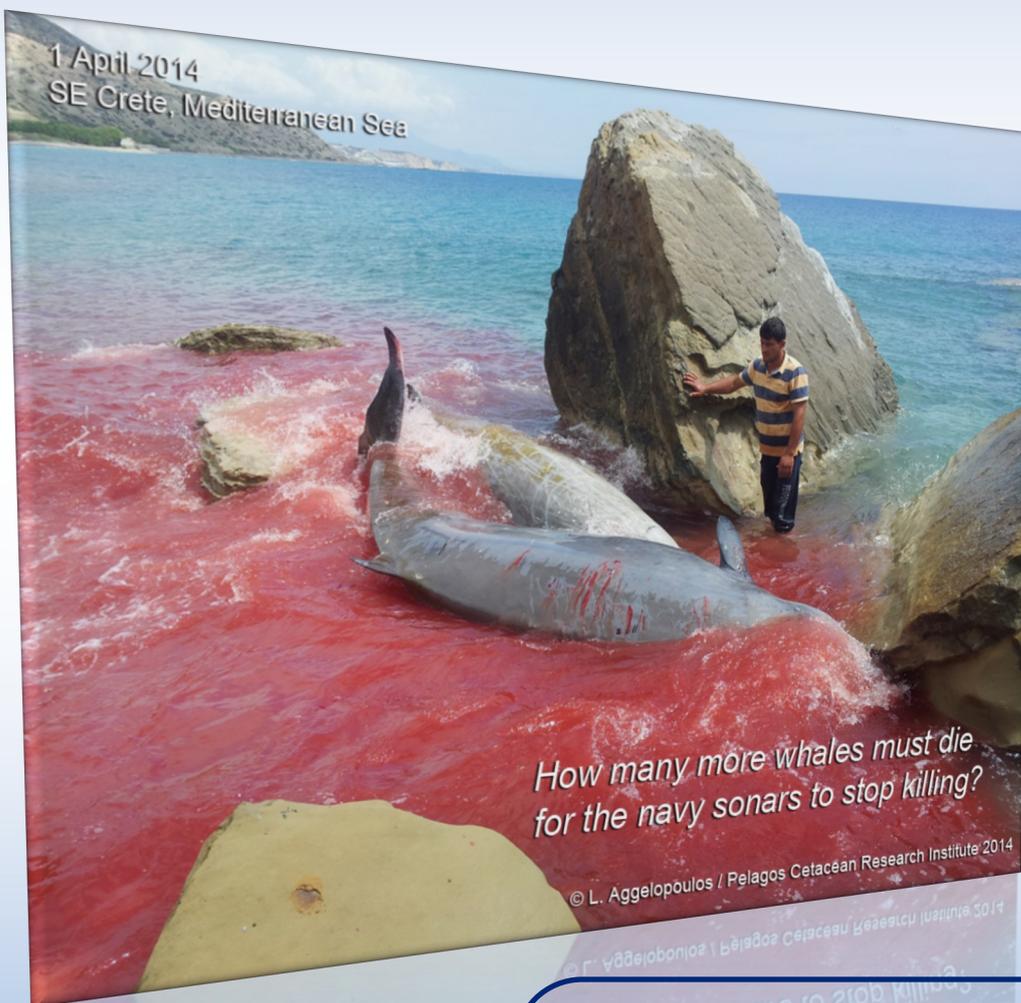
- **improving the communication and the public awareness,**
- **strengthening the research and monitoring activities in South Mediterranean Countries,**
- **reinforcing the management of areas of interest for cetaceans.**

[Final Report available here](#)



SHORT REPORT ON THE MASS STRANDING OF CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALES THAT OCCURRED ON THE 1ST OF APRIL 2014 IN SOUTH CRETE, GREECE DURING NAVAL EXERCISES

An atypical mass stranding of up to ten Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) occurred on the 1st April 2014 along the coasts of S and SW Crete, Greece, Mediterranean Sea. The mass stranding comprised several stranding events of one, two and three whales that stranded in three different locations/areas: Kaloi Limenes, Keratokampos (Kastri area) and Kalikovrechtis, from west to east. The western stranding in Kaloi Limenes was separated by 69 km in straight line from the eastern stranding in Kalikovrechtis. All live strandings occurred on the 1st of April, but three strandings of single dead whales occurred also on April 2, 5 and 6. The live strandings of the 1st of April started at 10:50 local time (GMT +3) in Kaloi Limenes, at about 11:15 in Keratokampos and at 13:05 in Kalikovrechtis indicating a temporal sequence from west to east. In total eight stranding events involving 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2 and 3 individuals were recorded. One of the stranded animals was pregnant carrying a 1.8 m long fetus. Photo-identification data showed that a minimum of six and a maximum of ten whales were involved in the mass stranding, since at least two single strandings concerned the same animal. Up to five single strandings might have concerned whales that had previously stranded and been re-floated or had drifted from one stranding location to another neighbouring one.



According to information published in the internet, which was later confirmed by officials of the Greek navy, a trilateral naval exercise named "Noble Dina 2014" was taking place during the mass stranding off the Cretan coasts. Warships from Greece, Israel and USA participated in the military manoeuvres, which included anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and use of military sonar. Further details regarding the naval exercise are still not available. However, according to the local port-police authorities, one US warship was observed on the 1st of April at about 3:00 (i.e. 8 hours before the first stranding) in Gavdos Island area, some 65 km west of the first stranding location in Kaloi Limenes.

Conclusions

- 1) The large spatial spread of various live whale strandings that occurred one after the other in time along the south and south-east coasts of Crete on April 1st classifies the event as atypical mass stranding of Cuvier's beaked whales (Frantzis 1998, Frantzis 2004).
- 2) The atypical characteristics of the mass stranding suggest that the cause should have a large synchronous spatial extent and a sudden onset. Such characteristics are shown by loud sound in the ocean like the one produced by military sonar, which is known to provoke atypical mass strandings of beaked whales (Fernandez *et al.* 2005). The proximity of warships conducting military manoeuvres with use of military sonar on April 1st indicates that this was the cause of the mass stranding.
- 3) This is the fourth time that Cuvier's beaked whales strand during naval exercises conducted in the area of the Hellenic Trench in Greece since 1998, raising the recorded mortalities to more than 45 whales (ACCOBAMS 2013). This number may be the "tip of the iceberg" (Peltier *et al.* 2012), since the effect at the population level is unknown. Unpublished data indicate a dramatic decline in single natural (i.e. not due to sonar use) strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales in the area after 1998. This decline may reflect a decline in the local population unit, suggesting that the impact of sonar is likely to be unsustainable.
- 4) The large spatial spread (69 km) of the whale strandings indicates that the use of military sonar can have a very important impact (including several mortalities) on local population units and especially on those that are isolated from larger populations, as is the case of the Mediterranean beaked whales (Dalebout *et al.* 2005).
- 5) The naval exercise and the use of military sonar occurred in an area that ACCOBAMS had mapped as an important habitat for Cuvier's beaked whales, where use of military sonar should not occur (ACCOBAMS 2013). Navies of countries members of this international agreement showed no respect to its recommendations causing severe harm to the marine environment. Both the scientific and conservation communities as well as EU and national authorities in the Mediterranean have to find ways to change this attitude before the ecological damage by military sonar becomes irreversible.



© Port-Police of Kastri Crete / Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute 2014

Article by Alexandros FRANTZIS

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STATEMENT OF CONCERN ABOUT OFFSHORE EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE ADRIATIC SEA DEVELOPED BY THE JOINT CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS NOISE WORKING GROUP (JOINT NWG)

The Noise Working Group of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee became a joint group with ASCOBANS in 2011 and evolved further to also include CMS in 2014. With two co-Chairs sharing the coordination role, it has been possible to build additional momentum into this important expert group. Members of the group now number over 50, at least twelve of whom regularly contribute to the tasks assigned to the group.

The activities of the group this year have been significant including developing an advisory statement about the appropriate details and focus for Environmental Impact Assessments for the '*CBD Expert Workshop on Underwater Noise and its Impacts on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity*' and a series of contributions for ACCOBAMS and CMS to regional processes and documents. In April, Joint NWG also participated in an ECS/ASOBANS/ACCOBAMS workshop: '*Introducing noise into the marine environment: what are the requirements for an impact assessment for marine mammals?*'

The most recent activity has been for the Joint NWG to develop a draft Statement of Concern on past and proposed offshore exploration activities in the Adriatic Sea for the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to consider. This work has been prompted following a seismic exploration permit being issued by Croatia to an offshore petroleum exploration company to conduct a 2D seismic survey over a significant area in the Adriatic Sea without an Environmental Impact Assessment having been conducted. While the exact details of the survey are not available, the sound intensity level produced by a single gun used in 2D or 3D offshore petroleum exploration survey could be in a range between 225-250 dB re 1 μ Pa₂. The species that may have been impacted include Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*), common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), Mediterranean monk seals (*Monachus monachus*) and loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) as well as a significant number of fish, crustacean, elasmobranch and cephalopod species.

It is now a well-established norm that assessment of likely impacts is a legal requirement for ACCOBAMS Parties, CMS Parties and EU Member States.

These three bodies have provided significant clarity about the expectations to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments in order to fully assess and effectively manage impacts associated with offshore seismic and drilling activities. The ACCOBAMS Noise Guidelines are clear that assessments of impact must be based on accurate data that includes the characteristics of specific survey being conducted and probable modelling of sound transmission from the area to be surveyed. This modelling should then be used to assess the potential impact on the full range of species found in the area.

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee will soon deliberate the Joint NWG's Statement of Concern about offshore exploration activities in the Adriatic Sea.

That the statement has been requested and developed serves as a strong indication that greater awareness may need to be raised within ACCOBAMS Parties about the implications and responsibilities of ACCOBAMS Resolution 4.17, the European Parliament and Council Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and CMS Resolution 10.24.

Full Statement of Concern is available [here](#)

SHIP STRIKES WORKSHOP PANAMA, JUNE 2014

A Joint *IWC-SPAW Workshop to Address Collisions Between Marine Mammals and Ships with a Focus on the Wider Caribbean* was held in June 2014 in Panama. 30 participants from all around the globe were present, including scientists, representatives from IWC member countries, the shipping industry as well as local and regional institutions. The workshop evaluated a number of existing **operational mitigation measures**, for example the adaption of Traffic Separation Schemes, speed reductions, Areas To Be Avoided and the like. As such measures will be implemented through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Workshop recommended that an appropriate mechanism be developed to encourage consideration of cetacean distribution and occurrences when new or revised routing schemes are brought to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). A variety of **technological approaches** were looked at, too, but the general Workshop conclusion on such tools was that none of the solutions available at the moment are perfect or assured to address the problem, or are applicable worldwide. Instead, a **combination of complementary tools** adapted to the biological and economical characteristics of the concerned area,

coupled with adequate **education measures**, is the best option to significantly reduce the risk of ship strikes. The discussion of potential actions thus focused on specific data collection, targeted outreach to vessel operators, stranding networks, direct collaborations with shipping stakeholders or navies as well as the development of guidance documents for the shipping industry, such as the ones recently developed by IWC targeting cruise operators and regatta organizers, respectively. Further recommendations also include that placing emphasis on the collection and reporting of data to the *IWC Global Ship Strikes Database* is most important, as this will be key to facilitate a proper evaluation, prioritisation and monitoring of ship strikes; and assist in the development of mitigation measures. With reference to MPAs, the workshop raised the idea of developing a 'go slow' ethic or speed limits for marine mammal protected areas.

With respect to mitigation measures that would also apply in the Mediterranean region (and in fact, globally) the Workshop agreed that those that separate whales from vessels (or at least minimise co-occurrence) in space and time are the most effective. The Workshop emphasised that the *most effective and only demonstrated* general method to ameliorate lethal strikes available at present is reduced speed. As long as technological solutions with proven effectiveness are not there and scientific knowledge around the issue is still relatively scarce, proper reporting will be paramount. This could be facilitated with a close coordination between Mediterranean local data bases on ship strikes and the global database at IWC ([IWC database](#)). Finally, it is of great importance that stakeholders (including authorities, scientists, NGOs, mariners) engage in a permanent dialogue and that increasing engagement between decision makers with the maritime sector is paramount. The latter should be realized both on the individual level by exchanging views with and informing companies and maritime schools/curricula, as well as on the political level, with ACCOBAMS range countries actively engaging with the IMO.

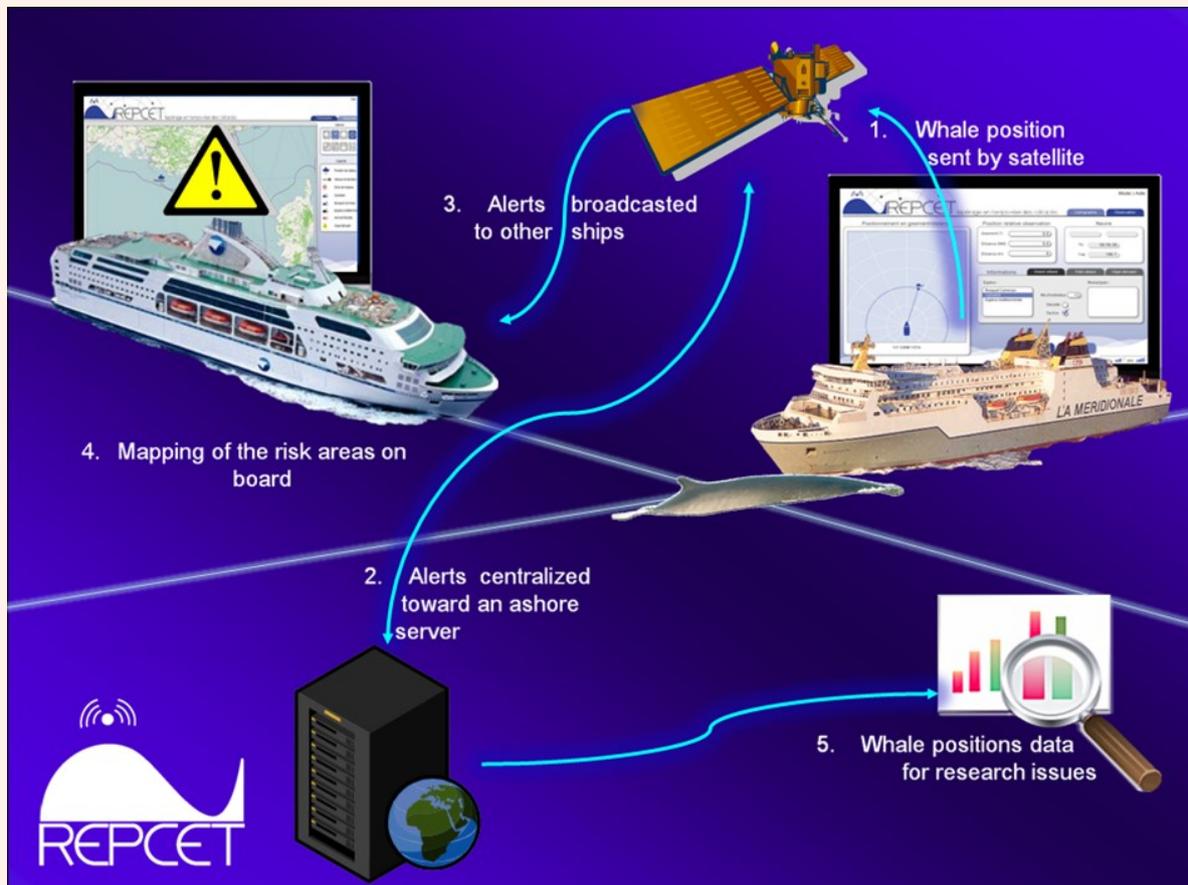
Article by Fabian RITTER



REPCET NETWORK: THE WAY FORWARD?

In the Mediterranean Sea, ship strikes are considered one of the main causes of mortality for fin whales and sperm whales. It is estimated that between 7 and 33 fin whales could be killed each year by collisions only.

To reduce the risk of ship strikes, scientists, shipping companies, environmental managers and engineers joined forces to create the REPCET system (www.repcet.com). REPCET (REal-time Plotting of CETaceans) is a collaborative software that allows equipped ships to communicate the positions of large cetaceans they spot on their way to each other in real-time thanks to a satellite communication.



Ten ships are currently equipped with the system. In addition to the existing fleet (3 car-ferries from *La Méridionale*, the cable layer from *Orange Marine*, the LNG from *GDF Suez/Gazocéan*, the cement-carrier from *SOMECA Transport* and a private sailing boat used for research purposes) 3 additional ships joined the network in 2014: an aviso from the French Navy, a speedboat from the Maritime Affairs and a high-sea tugboat from *Bourbon* chartered by the French Navy (the last two being equipped thanks to the support from the French MPA Agency). Three “shore” versions have also been equipping the French Mediterranean Marine Rescue Coordination Centre (*CROSSMED*), the Port-Cros national Park and *Souffleurs d’Ecume* for several years. Moreover, two NGOs (WWF France and *Participe Futur*) were also provided with a REPCET device during their cetacean surveys this summer.

Although the REPCET network is slowly growing on the French side due to the commitment of a few private ship owners and the State, Resolutions adopted by Pelagos and ACCOBAMS should have allowed obtaining similar results in other countries. Unfortunately, no foreign ship is currently equipped with REPCET despite numerous awareness raising efforts among ship owners and public authorities in several countries.

However, during the towing of *Costa Concordia* in July 2014 the Italian Ministry of Environment required the Italian NGO *Oceanomare Delphis Onlus* in charge of monitoring the impact of the operation on cetaceans to equip its sailing boat with REPCET. A collaboration agreement is now underway between *Oceanomare* and *Souffleurs d’Ecume* and other Italian supports have also indicated their willingness to help to spread REPCET in Italy following the last Pelagos Scientific and Technical Committee in November 2014.

These positive signs in Italy may allow reaching the 30 equipped ships necessary to test the system, according to resolutions from the IWC-ACCOBAMS ship strike workshop in Beaulieu in 2010. In fact, the system is fully operational and *Souffleurs d’Ecume* remains at the disposal of any stakeholder of the Parties willing to get involved in this experiment.

Article by Jerome COUVAT & Pascal MAYOL

**3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MARINE MAMMALS PROTECTED AREAS
(ICMMPA, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA)
&
IUCN WORLD PARK CONGRESS
(SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA) (6-16 NOVEMBER 2014)**

The theme of the 3rd International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (ICMMPA 3), "Important Marine Mammal Areas – A Sense of Place, A Question of Size" gave attention to developing and refining criteria for the identification of important marine mammal areas and to addressing the challenges and strategies of managing very large and very small marine mammal protected areas. New developments in science and management were highlighted, training and capacity-building sessions were offered, providing a forum for sharing information on approaches to marine mammal management and conservation including knowledge products developed by the newly formed IUCN MMPA Task Force.

During the participation to the Conference, the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee had the occasion to refer to the ACCOBAMS work programme in several occasions, stressing the need to move further on the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative and other priority actions. In particular the following presentations were made:

- *Panel 3: How Are Marine Mammals Being Managed in the Large MPAs.* A presentation was made during this panel in plenary meeting on: Looking beyond Pelagos to conserve marine mammals of the Mediterranean. During the talk, data on the recent aerial surveys in the Central Mediterranean Sea and on the satellite telemetry project were presented, stressing the need to focus conservation efforts on a wide area, including the Gulf of Lions and the sea around the Balearic Islands.
- *Workshop 1: Marine Spatial Planning.* A presentation was given during this workshop on the need to apply Marine Spatial Planning and an Ecosystem Based Management approach in the ACCOBAMS area, focusing on the Pelagos Sanctuary and on the North Western Mediterranean Pelagic Ecosystem EBSA.
- *Workshop 9: Examining the Unique Threats in MMPAs in Heavily Developed Coastlines.* During this workshop a presentation was given on: Ship strikes in the Mediterranean Sea: assessment and mitigation measures. The ship strike case of the Mediterranean was presented, stressing the need to joint effort for the assessment of mitigation measures and for the collection of ship strike records from the whole ACCOBAMS area. The fruitful relationship with the IWC was presented, referring to the joint workshops and recommendations prepared.

During the World Park Congress in Sydney, the Chair was invited to participate to the event on *Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas: roadmap to achieve the Aichi targets* organized by MedPAN. Goal of this event was to briefly present the actions needed to establish an ecological network of Marine Protected Areas which is effectively and sustainably managed identified by the 2012 Mediterranean MPA Forum and illustrate the Roadmap aimed at achieving, by 2020, the objectives set by international commitments.

During the session, the Mediterranean community did showcase how different stakeholder groups are implementing the recommendations of the Mediterranean MPA Roadmap.

The presentation has been organized around different level of support provided at:

- local level (MPA managers)
- national level (national authorities and MPA agencies)
- Mediterranean level (Barcelona Convention and other institutions, MPA regional network, NGOs...).

The Chair intervention focused on Areas of special importance for cetacean conservation identified by ACCOBAMS. The action on MPA in the 2014-2016 work-plan, mentioning the 2015 workshop on 'Effectiveness of MPA with Critical Habitat for Cetaceans' and illustrating the Terms of Reference for the workshop, was presented.

The LIFE+ MIGRATE Project

The EU LIFE + MIGRATE project (LIFE11 NAT/MT/1070) was conceptualised to try to investigate the status of the population of the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Maltese waters, with the aim to address existing information gaps by obtaining more data on these species. A total of 84 cetaceans sightings were recorded, with preliminary analysis of the data collected confirming earlier information (please refer to Initial assessment report on cetacean in www.mepa.org.mt/water-msfd) that the most common species locally are the bottlenose dolphin, the striped dolphin and the common dolphin. The group size of cetacean encounters was generally small with 1 to 20 individuals per sighting and pods of more than 30 individuals were rarely observed. Other cetacean species spotted were the Risso's dolphin, and the sperm whale.



To raise awareness on the project, numerous promotional activities have and are still being carried out, i.e. the project's logo with its wording "A Wave of Hope for Marine Life" , the website (<http://www.lifeprojectmigrate.com>) containing regular updates on the project and a quarterly newsletter, brochures with concise details of the project, identification keys and pictures of the 'most common' species one expects to find in Maltese waters and stickers and beach umbrellas bearing the LIFE+MIGRATE logos, produced to enhance the visibility of the project.

Numerous training sessions have also been delivered to educate and inform various sea-users, members of the public, the maritime squadron of the Armed Forces of Malta, the marine section of the Civil Protection Department and divers about this project and to provide training on these species. KAI with MEPA's assistance have also coordinated and done a number of sectorial workshops addressed to stakeholders.



Finally, since networking with other projects is crucial to maximize information exchanges and experience-sharing between local and foreign similar projects, e.g. very important links were established with Birdlife Malta (BLM) who provided data on cetaceans and turtles gathered during their surveying for sea-birds in other projects. (Full article available [here](#)).

NEWS FROM "MARE NOSTRUM"

Monitoring and conservation of Black Sea dolphins program (Protect dolphins!)

Mare Nostrum was established in summer 1993 as an association of specialists to address the continuous degradation of Black Sea marine and coastal ecosystems. Most of the Mare Nostrum members are specialists in different fields such as marine research and environmental protection; however, they recognized that the capacity of science alone to solve the problems of severe ecological imbalances is limited. And from November 2013 has the status of ACCOBAMS Partner.

The organization is open to all citizens concerned about environmental degradation Romanian seaside, whose mission is to change current practices and attitudes of local communities, policy makers and other interest groups, those that ensure the conservation and rational use of resources of Romanian natural coastline. Focusing on partnership and respect for the environment, Mare Nostrum works towards public awareness, environment education and pressure to decision makers for effective protection of the Romanian Black Sea coastal zone environment, which represent a total of 245 km coastline, and consist of three geomorphologic sectors:

- north, the Danube Delta;
- in the middle, Razim-Sinoe with grinds separating it from the sea;
- South coast of Dobrogea consists of an alternation of cliffs, beaches and coasts lined border between southern Chituc and Bulgarian border.

Cetacean monitoring and conservation activities represent a **strategic direction** for Mare Nostrum, the beginning being situated somewhere before 2000 (1998, exactly) period in which were conducted land expedition for data collection on strandings and awareness campaigns. The official start is considered to be year 2001 when under collaboration with National Institute of Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa" and the Natural Science Museum Complex worked at "Action plan for the conservation of cetacean from the Romanian Black Sea area" in the frame of the project with the same name, funded through Life Natura Program.

After almost a decade working on this topic through projects financed from Life Natura, GEF/SGP, ACCOBAMS, Structural Funds and private companies, Mare Nostrum developed a program called "Monitoring and conservation of Black Sea dolphins" in the frame of which were developed all the activities dedicated to this important link of marine ecosystem.



Our current activities today include: **stranding, bycatch and sighting monitoring** (data collecting) which is one of our strongest activity. Such data could help not only to better understand what's happening with this part of the dolphins' population, that is regularly visiting this area, but also to better estimate the ecological status of its environment. As results we have more than 30 land expeditions/year and 20 days on sea/year in which collected data for 450 strandings, 439 cetaceans in 64 sightings and 71 bycatches. Population monitoring by conducting the regular transect line **surveys using photo-identification method**, for which we developed with the colleagues from OBIS Seamap (contributors from 2011) an interactive database for Black Sea photo-identification in which all the riparian scientist could upload and compare pictures in the way of identifying cetaceans.

In 2014 we printed out first sample of the *Romanian Black Sea Cetaceans Photo-ID Catalog*, which includes 23 dolphins (from total of 85) from *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* and *Delphinus delphis ponticus* species. The surveys are done through direct observations from a small fiberglass boat (RIB), yacht and fishing boats. Consolidation of the **cetacean stranding network** (maritime police, coast guard, fishermen, Marine research and development

institute, Romanian Waters Administration, research institutes, public institutions, schools, port administrations, marinas, yacht skippers, divers etc.) and related dissemination of the collected information (reactivated in 2010 by Mare Nostrum). Over a five year period, from January 2010 – December 2014, a total of 321 cetaceans were reported stranded (round 70% of the total no of strandings). Related to this was established in 2011 an **Emergency Task Force** for special events (live strandings – 3 cases recorded, mass strandings etc) performing the **post-mortem exams** of stranded animals, in cooperation with the Sanitary Veterinary Direction of Constanta county; monitoring on cetacean-fisheries interactions and **testing ADD/PINGERS** as conservation method (from 2010) using 100 Aquamark Pingers and meetings with fishermen for finding solutions for a better cetacean-fisheries interaction.

Results are encouraging, but many fishermen have spontaneously decided to give up with turbot and concentrate on other species with gears that are not so prone to involving interactions with dolphins like sea snails (*Rapana sp.*).

Awareness and education. Since the beginning of the organization, we have been very active in educating and informing the public about cetaceans and our work and in raising public awareness about the importance of cetaceans, the threats they are facing and the need for a healthy marine environment. This is being done through lectures and presentations at schools, faculties and various events, the publication of popular articles and interviews, documentary film, exhibitions of photographs taken in the field, the production of information material and a code of conduct for yachts people (result of the photo ID catalog), the development of an internet site, and the organization of specific activities such as the "Adopt a dolphin" campaign or simply distributing leaflets in face-to-face campaigns or info centers (Natural Science Museum Complex, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration) in Romania, distributing over 10.000 leaflets every year. Every year we have two sessions of training for new volunteers (500 - 1000 students and teachers) engaged in the schools clubs which will monitor the coastline sectors over the school year (every year, between 25 - 35 groups of volunteers are included in the network). Every group receives a field set which includes also the "Volunteers field monitoring guide" and monitors the sector twice per month.

Dissemination of information. The work of Mare Nostrum is public and we keep informing the public about all our activities, achievements and results. It seems that our activities have had a positive impact on the Romanian population and on foreigners as well.

All the data collected between 2010-2014 are uploaded on OBIS SEAMAP online database in order to be available to all scientists interested and public on five open databases: strandings, bycatches, sightings from shore and by boat, photo-identification) and one user application database with Black Sea cetacean photo ID Catalog.

Future challenge. Mare Nostrum NGO will improve capacity building on collection of biological material useful to understand population pathology, genetic structure and emerging pollution threats and performing the post-mortem analyses on pathology, bacteriology and virology of stranded animals. Already made first passes starting collaboration with several Romanian institutions (science and education) and University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Science Brno – prof. MVDr. David Modrý, PhD.



Overview on "Monitoring and conservation of Black Sea dolphins" program (Mare Nostrum archive)

MODELLING THE BASIN-WIDE DISTRIBUTION OF MEDITERRANEAN SPERM WHALES: AN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

Understanding the spatial and temporal distribution of cetacean populations is important for the development of successful management and conservation policies. However, such assessment is complicated by their large-scale movements beyond national boundaries, which often leads to patchy data collection in restricted portions of their home range. A critical example of this situation is the endangered population of sperm whales inhabiting the Mediterranean Sea. This has been the object of several localised studies, but information on its overall distribution is still lacking, hindering appropriate management decisions and effective marine spatial planning.

Enrico Pirotta (CEFE-CNRS, Montpellier, France), Olivier Gimenez (CEFE-CNRS, Montpellier, France) and Luke Rendell (University of St Andrews, UK) are proposing a large scale collaboration between the research groups operating around the Mediterranean Sea to combine the information collected in the past three decades and investigate the spatio-temporal patterns of sperm whale distribution across the basin, as well as any association with environmental characteristics.

The project, which has received the patronage of ACCOBAMS, aims to develop a suitable analytical approach for the integration of such a diverse range of data. This framework could be widely applicable to other marine predator species in the Mediterranean Sea and around the globe. The results of the proposed work will hopefully provide scientifically sound conservation advice for sperm whales while fostering a constructive international collaboration within the ACCOBAMS area. Several research groups have already given their endorsement to the project and agreed to contribute their data, and funding is currently being sought to support the initiative.



UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

29th ECS Conference, Malta, 23-25 March 2015

ACCOBAMS Regional Workshops, Tunisia, 13-17 April 2015

Workshop on Marine Protected Areas, Tunisia, 12-13 June 2015

10th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, Monaco, 20-22 October 2015

10th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau, Morocco, 24-25 November 2015



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