

Network for the Conservation of Cetaceans and Sea Turtles in the Adriatic

The Netcet Project is financed by the IPA Adriatic CBC Programme and more specifically within the Priority 2 “Natural and Cultural Resources and Risk Prevention”.

The general aim of this Cross-border Cooperation Programme is strengthening sustainable development capabilities of the Adriatic region through a concerted strategy of action among the partners of the eligible territories.

Web site: www.adriaticipacbc.org

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1. The development of an Adriatic Emergency Taskforce: results from Chioggia meeting



The Adriatic is a semi-enclosed sea characterized by specific morphological and geographical features. These characteristics and the several anthropic activities such as transports, oil exploration and human presence along the entire coastline, enhance the possibility of maritime disaster in this area. For this reason, the NETCET project foresees a specific activity aimed at creating an Emergency Task Force to face situations such as mass mortalities, environmental disasters and any anomalous situation involving cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic Sea. This action meets also institutional indications, as ACCOBAMS Recommendation 4.16.

A first meeting was organized in Chioggia in March 2014 between the NETCET partners involved in this specific action in order to share knowledge, protocols, legislations and equipments to be used in these events. Very few events were

reported during the last years, most of them related to natural causes (i.e. unusual mass mortalities) but a big concern arises in relation to the increasing numbers of permits for seismic surveys released on both coastlines. Almost all countries around the Adriatic sea are ready to face environmental disasters such as oil spills, and specific protocols already ensure a cooperation between Adriatic riparian countries, like the Sub-Regional Contingency Plan for prevention of preparedness and response to major marine pollution incidents in the Adriatic Sea. Following the existing conventions, the three Northern Adriatic countries Italy-Slovenia-Croatia signed a trilateral agreement for merging their forces, expertise, equipment and response measures against incidents causing or likely to cause pollution in the Adriatic Sea for their respective areas.

Starting from Chioggia meeting, the creation of an Adriatic Emergency Task Force will necessarily take in consideration these agreements in order to propose an involvement of other Adriatic countries in addition to Croatia, Slovenia and Italy and to include also specific protocols, on-scene coordinator body and a list of experts for marine wildlife, specifically sea turtles and cetaceans, as foreseen in ACCOBAMS recommendations.

Furthermore, all the NETCET partners will be invited to attend a specific workshop on cetaceans unusual mortality events coordination and management, possibly available also in streaming, to be organised in Padua in December 2014. At the beginning of 2015, a meeting in Pula (HR) is planned in the framework of the NETCET Project: during this event, the proposal for an Adriatic Emergency Task Force will be presented. Meanwhile, all experts involved in the project are cooperating in order to face all stranding events in a coordinated way and to enforce the scientific and technical network within the Adriatic created by the NETCET Project.

Sandro Mazzariol – University of Padua

2. New sea turtle emergency and rehabilitation centres in Croatia

One of the main purposes of the NETCET project is to strengthen technical capacity for the recovery and treatment of sea turtles. In Croatia, the State Institute for Nature Protection organises and runs a National Alerting and Monitoring System for captured, dead, injured and sick animals of strictly protected species. In



the frame of the Alerting and Monitoring System, the Protocol for strictly protected marine animals (mammals, turtles and cartilaginous fishes) was developed during 2010 and 11 veterinary clinics and ambulances for first aid were created on the Adriatic coast and islands. Veterinary clinics and ambulances acting as emergency centres or auxiliary emergency centres for sea turtles vary according to their location and intervention capacity. The Croatian Veterinary Institute and Faculty of Veterinary Medicine are also included in the Protocol network. Thanks to the NETCET project, veterinary emergency centres are equipped in Pula, Rijeka, Senj, Pag/Pag Island, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Korčula/Korčula Island and Dubrovnik, while auxiliary emergency centres are in Krk/Krk Island, Mali Lošinj/Lošinj Island and Brač/Brač Island. The veterinary staff was trained by key experts from the University of Padua during a training course aimed at improving and standardizing veterinary care, surgical approaches, necropsy protocol and stranding management for cetaceans and sea turtles.

Besides this educational programme, each emergency or auxiliary emergency centre was equipped with small veterinary equipment (instruments), small laboratory equipment and consumables, handheld GPS, photo cameras, chest freezers, plastic containers, aquarium heaters and towels, depending on their needs, in order to

strengthen their technical intervention capacity.

From January 2013 to June 2014, thanks to this emergency centres network, 10 sea turtles were hospitalised, while 74 dead individuals were collected. If the carcass was in good condition, necropsy was done in an emergency centre or in Croatian Veterinary Institute. 7 sea turtles were successfully recovered in the emergency centres and released back into the sea, while 3 individuals were sent to the rehabilitation centre in Pula (see next article) for longer recovery period.

After training and technical intervention capacity improvement of our emergency centres network and in addition to raising awareness activities for different target groups performed in the frame of NETCET project, we noticed a visible increase in efficiency of emergency centres and alerting system. A very good example is the case of a sea turtle recovered at the Split emergency centre: the turtle's front fin was folded by nylon string, resulting in necrotic process. In Split emergency centre, amputation was successfully performed and the turtle was recovered by the Marine Educational Centre Pula, NETCET partner, in the Brioni National Park, equipped with a suitable sea turtles rehabilitation tank. The turtle is now in very good condition: if the condition of this sea turtle continues to be as good, release is planned for Autumn this year.

Jasna Jeremic – State Institute for Nature Protection

3. The renovated Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in Pula, Croatia

The Marine Educational Centre Pula (MEC) is a non-government organization in charge of the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre since 2006. As a partner in the NETCET project, one of its activities was the renovation of the Centre, which was presented to the public on 24th of April 2014. The event started with an address by the president of MEC Pula, Dr. Milena Mičić, who greeted the audience and spoke about the history of MEC Pula and the Centre. After the introduction of the project, with its activities and goals, a tour of the renovated Centre followed. It is important to mention the main guests of the event, Dr. Matija Franković, director of the State institute of Nature Protection in Croatia, also a partner in the project and Kristina Fedel Timovski, Head of Department of International Relations and European policy in the City of Pula.



The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre is located on the first floor of Fort Verudela, an Austro-Hungarian fortress from 1886. Prior to the renovation, the Centre had only one room at its disposal for a simultaneous recovery of 6 turtles maximum but no adequate filtering system and only submerged heaters for winter time.

Today, the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre has three rooms (rehabilitation room, laboratory and first aid and educational room) with an autonomous filtering and heating system for turtle tanks. The capacity has increased to 9 tanks and the turtle rehabilitation and diagnostics have been improved thanks to some new instruments for blood analysis. All supporting equipment (scales, measuring tapes, dishes etc.) and examination tables (used for turtle condition checks and daily care) were renewed. For educational purposes a new room of 40m² was opened displaying sea turtles biology posters, as well as an educational screen combined with a children's corner. Today the Centre has 2 turtles, "Sara" with gastrointestinal injuries and "Severina", a turtle confiscated in Vranjic, Split by the Ministry of Nature Protection. On Friday 20th of June 2014 four turtles were released from the Centre during the annual release event organized by MEC.

In addition to the renovation, the activities of MEC Pula during the three years of project implementation are also: raising awareness of boat drivers by production and distribution of posters among Croatian harbors, organizing turtle release events and providing information on turtles during visits to the Centre.

Karin Gobić, Aquarium Pula and Marine Educational Centre Pula

4. Awareness rising in fishing communities in Albania

Albanian coastline is estimated to be approximately 427 km, with numerous fishermen communities grouped in four major ports: Shengjin, Durres, Vlora and Saranda. There are several small groups of fishermen taking place in some small coast areas, as well. In the framework of NETCET the working group of Herpetofauna Albanian Society met the fishermen in the first three ports belonging to the Adriatic coast and 2 small groups of fishermen in Patok and Rodon areas.

Meetings have started in the fall of 2013 and are still going on. During these meetings, representatives of HAS have been able to meet about 100 fishermen. At first, the objectives of NETCET and HAS contribution as one of Albanian partners were presented. Then, HAS experts explained some biological and ecological details trying to make sure that fishermen understand the importance of sea turtles in the environment. The impact of humans on the environment and their negative activities increasing the risk of extinction of certain living species were also explained. In addition, fishermen were briefed on how biodiversity loss is a result of wrong practices exploiting natural resources.



The second part of these meetings focuses on some live demonstrations on how the fishermen can bring on board a sea turtle that they may find floating in the water or even entangled in a net. The handling and releasing of turtles, correct position of transportation to and from the sea and some other health issues

related to them were also illustrated. The researchers explained the importance of the fishermen in the conservation policies for these animals which have already qualified under International Union for Conservation of Nature as globally endangered. They tried to make them understand that the best conservation efforts for sea turtles will not come from the Albanian government or scientific groups, but by those people that do meet them every day in their life, the fishermen.

Dissemination products such as T-shirts showing correct handling procedures, leaflets and bags prepared by WWF-Italy and the City of Venice and translated in Albanian by HAS were distributed during these meetings. Posters entitled “How fishermen save sea turtles” prepared by WWF-Italy, were affixed on fishing boats and in the public areas of the ports (even in coffee bars where fishermen drink the coffee when they are back from the sea): the relevant instructions on coming in to help injured creatures as well as other necessary information about sea turtles and cetaceans are exposed in those strategic places. This material should help the fishermen on the conservation efforts when they will be offshore and meet a turtle in need.

These meetings will continue with other small groups of fishermen along the Albanian coastline, and HAS is planning to organize a second series of meetings with all the fishermen groups in Albanian ports that have been visited till now, trying to understand how effective were the first ones.

Vilma Piroli, Herpetofauna Albanian Society

5. NETCET educational activities for schoolchildren have started!

Among the NETCET awareness and dissemination activities about issues of cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic, schoolchildren of primary and secondary schools are also taken into consideration. This importance of increasing sensibility of children of fishermen, boat drivers, sea users in general is crucial to the project.

The meetings with the classes began this spring in Italy and have been managed by the operators of the rehabilitation and emergency centres of the NETCET project. Classes are supported by three types of posters and multimedia tools (videos and power point presentations). The topics dealt with children are mainly the biological and ecological characteristics of the species of marine turtles and cetaceans living in the Adriatic



and especially the problems they may encounter due to human activities. The interest of the children was very high but the main thing that these activities want to convey in addition to arouse enthusiasm for these animals and deepen their knowledge, is to increase awareness of their responsibility and their understanding on how simple acts of sustainable living and respect for the environment could help to safeguard these marine species. For example, plastic material improperly thrown into the sea or on the beach, can cause great health problems if ingested by turtles and dolphins; as a result, small gestures like creating proper recycling can save marine animals.

The rehabilitation centre of Riccione, managed by the Cetacea Foundation, have already organised 34 hours of lessons into different classes, attended by 471 students and will continue for the next school year (2014/2015).

In Veneto, the school lessons were organized by the Natural History Museum of Venice designated by the City of Venice, the NETCET Project coordinator: the lessons involved about one hundred students and their teachers, who participated in activities and games that focus on sea turtles.



Teachers and schoolchildren who received this educational activity were asked to divulgate what they learnt to the whole school. The Educational-kit made of drawings, posters and multimedia presentations can be presented to the companions of the other classes, and re-used in the following years.

Antonio Socci, Venice Natural History Museum and Valeria Angelini, Cetacea Foundation

6. The City of Venice launches a new good practice for the NETCET project

One important aim for the City of Venice is to protect cetaceans and sea turtle that cross the Adriatic Sea, bumping into risks caused by human activities. Every year a great number of these animals strands on the Venetian shores, injured or dead. For scientific and ecological reasons, it would be important to know their position and their path in the Adriatic Sea through the support of a database in which every sighting could be represented.

The City of Venice has decided to connect the NETCET project to another Venetian project called Atlas of the Lagoon, born in 2002 from an idea of the Department of The Lagoon and Territory Observatory of City of Venice (<http://www.silvenezia.it/>).

The Atlas of the Lagoon is a web portal which allows access to environmental geographical data about the lagoon of Venice produced by a multitude of public bodies. The Atlas of the Lagoon is a working and knowledge tool for the protection and preservation of the lagoon, the hinterland and the sea of Venetian jurisdiction. Although the lagoon is the area of main interest for the Atlas, environmental data relative to its catchments basin and coastal waters are also included. The key objective of the Atlas is to bring together and organise the information held by separate data producer bodies, so that a variety of users (citizens, professionals, and various institutions) could refer to a single, shared information base.



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The Atlas is made up of a set of interactive maps described by texts, tables, illustrations, and external databases, about several environmental features. These maps are created thanks to the contribution of several partners which share environmental dataset. These datasets are open and free for everyone. Nowadays there are 12 partners which collaborate for the implementation of the Atlas. Each Atlas partners check and update their own data through internet and using licenses compatible with the Open Definition, according to which a data is open if all are able to use, reuse and redistribute it freely. The only constraint is to mention the source and redistribute it in the same way. The dataset is collected in 453 layers, united in 11 thematic area. The layers can be overlapped on each other allowing a comparison between several dataset.

Thanks to the collaboration of the Natural Historical Museum, the City of Venice is working to create another layer dedicated to Sea Turtle sightings. Every sighting will be represented by a point of coordinates and it will be described by a form containing date and time of sighting, species, and other information which could be interesting, like injuries, death and so on. The Atlas is continuously on progress.

The City of Venice is going to improve the sea dataset in order to compare the sightings with other layers such as the one regarding pollution or human presence, and therefore to create a dynamic way to make evolving evaluations, understand causes and consequences of injuries, death or simply check the presences of sea turtles in a particular area of the Adriatic Sea.

This good practice can also be used like a support for the Venetian rescue centre that will be open soon on the island of Lido...but this is another story!

Carla Santoro, City of Venice

NEWS IN BRIEF

Next partner meeting in Tirana (Albania): 1-2 October 2014



The next partner meeting will be held in Tirana, Albania, in October 2014, hosted by HAS. The event will be a useful occasion for the NETCET partners to evaluate the already achieved results and plan the next steps to realize the project's objectives.



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Contact

City of Venice

Economic Development, European
Policies and Strategic Plan Division

City of Venice - San Marco 4299 30124 Venice - Italy – info@netcet.eu - 00 39 041 2747826 / 7830 / 7834
www.netcet.eu - www.facebook.com/NETCETproject

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San Marco 4299
30124 Venice - Italy

info@netcet.eu

+39 041 2747826 / 7830 / 7834

www.netcet.eu

www.facebook.com/NETCETproject

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