

## 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](http://www.adriaticipacbc.org)

### SUMMARY

- Let's become familiar with the C&ST who live in Adriatic
- First steps to establish a Scientific and City Network
- How can we help a stranded or injured sea turtle
- The workshop in Riccione (Italy) February 2013
- The workshop in Losinj (Croatia) February 2013
- The NETCET veterinary training courses

## 1. Let's become familiar with the cetaceans and sea turtles who live in our Adriatic Sea

### Sea turtles



when surfing the Adriatic waters. It is not so infrequent, to see something moving fast, for a few moments, just below the surface of the water: the

dark silhouette of a sea turtle. Habituated to this sea, sea turtles are solitary and "discrete" visitors that, at least at certain times of the year, can also become very abundant.

In any case, unless you are very lucky, all the sea turtles sighted in our sea belong to the same species, the loggerhead turtle, *Caretta caretta* for science. In the Mediterranean sea there are two other species: the rare green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, and the giant

and the very special leatherback turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*. The latter two species are not usually present in the Adriatic, although it can occur, especially in the southern area.

The loggerhead turtle is the smallest of the sea turtles in the Mediterranean, reaching 110 cm of carapace length and weighing up to 180 kilograms. The carapace is colour reddish-brown, and in young individuals it has a dorsal toothed fairing; the plastron is yellowish. Its head,

covered with scales, is wide and sturdy and that is why it is named loggerhead in English. In adult male specimens the tail is considerably longer than that of the females.

Loggerhead is found in temperate waters throughout the world. In the Mediterranean, nesting sites are found predominantly in the Eastern area and include: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Libya and, to a lesser extent, Syria, Israel, Tunisia and Egypt. It is

also likely that some nesting takes place along the entire Mediterranean coast of North Africa. It is the only species nesting on the Italian coasts: in the far south, and in the Pelagie Islands.

*Caretta caretta* feeds on fish such as seahorses and pipefish living and hiding in the *Posidonia* meadows. However in shallow water it looks also for lobsters, crabs and shrimps and many other species of molluscs which live on rocks

or on the seabed. In fact, it is an opportunist species that eats almost everything is able to find.

During the laying, from 40 to 190 eggs are released. The laying period in the Mediterranean goes from late spring to early autumn.. The laying of the eggs does not occur every year and the interval between the various cycles presents a considerable variability.

### Cetaceans

Eight species of cetaceans are considered regularly present in the Mediterranean. In addition, there are several other species occasionally sighted in the basin.

The Adriatic however, due to its chemical and physical characteristics, hosts only one stable species: the bottlenose dolphin.

Sporadic sightings of other species can occur: fin whale, sperm whale, common dolphin, Risso's dolphin, and a more or less regular striped dolphin, but limited only to the southern part of the sea, south of the Gargano promontory.

The bottlenose dolphin is an odontocete, generally preferring coastal habitat, and can be found in almost all the seas of the globe. It is also the most common cetacean in dolphinarium and aquariums around the world. As said, it is the only marine mammal regularly present in the north-central Adriatic. The species presents a huge geographical variability, and different populations have morphological, and also ecological characteristics which may vary a lot. In general, there are a coastal form and a pelagic one. In the Mediterranean, the average length is around 2.5-3.5 m, with a weight of 270-350 kg. The livery has shades of grey more or less marked, often with whitish areas. The belly is white.



The sexual maturity for females occurs at around 5-13 years, for males is between 9 and 14 years. The breeding season runs from January until the end of March and the gestation lasts about 12 months. At the time of their birth, the size of Mediterranean specimens is estimated to be around 1.1 m.

The female gives birth to a single baby at a time (except in very rare cases of twin births), for an average of 8 newborns, in a 30 years life time. Typically between a birth and the next one, 3 years pass.

The diet of a bottlenose dolphin appears to be very wide, being an opportunist species, feeding on what the environment can present at higher concentration, at that time. Its preys comprehend: cephalopods, small pelagic fish, gastropods and other benthic organisms such as shellfish or bottom fish.

Bottlenose dolphin is not often caught in nets or other fishing gear, but the prey depletion, caused by fishery, and chemical pollution are problems of very high concern.

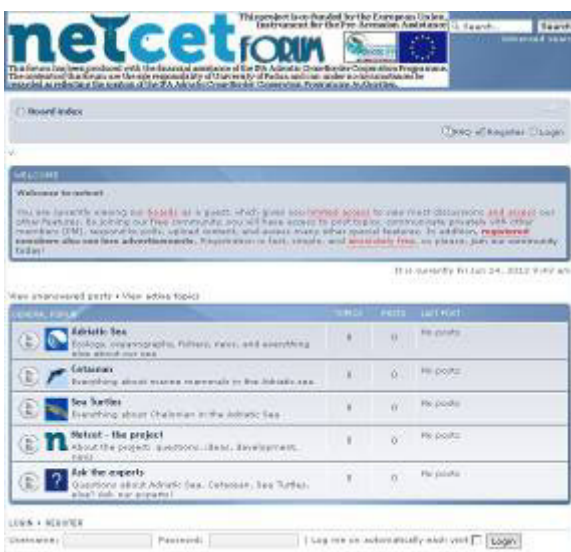
*Marco Affronte*

## 2. NETCET's first steps to establish a Scientific and City Network for the conservation of the sea turtles and cetaceans

### The Scientific/Technical Network

The main objective of the Netcet project is to develop common strategies for the conservation of sea turtles and cetaceans in the Adriatic, through regional cooperation. One of the main purposes is to enhance cooperation and strengthen networking among all institutions involved in sea turtles/cetaceans conservation throughout the Adriatic.

So, one of the NETCET action is about "Establishing a scientific and technical network among relevant organizations and experts in the Adriatic enhancing linkages with similar networks in the Mediterranean". In order to reach those aims, some tools has been created (see the blue box):



#### La pagine Facebook

The Facebook page has been created in December 2012, and it can be found at the address:

<https://www.facebook.com/NETCETproject>.

The page must be considered not only as a point for information and dissemination, but also as a tool for contacts and information exchange (networking) among the project participants, and the people interested in it. The page will be regularly updated with news related to Netcet and disclosures related to the Adriatic and the Netcet ambits (cetaceans, sea turtles, strandings, etc...). Partners and "followers" are encouraged to periodically post news and updates.

#### Forum

A Forum is a virtual place, an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. The main objective of the forum is to support, enhance and improve the discussion and debate among the partners, the experts and the general public, and to share knowledge and experiences in a full and productive manner. The Forum is divided in five main categories:

- Adriatic sea
- Cetacean
- Sea Turtles
- Netcet – the project
- Ask the experts

The "Ask the expert" area is where visitors can post questions about Adriatic Sea, Cetaceans, Sea Turtles, and receive a replay from one the Netcet experts. The Netcet forum is open to everybody but users have to register themselves into the forum (only the first time), in order to post messages.

The forum can be reached at the address:

<http://netcet.freeforums.org/>

### The Adriatic City Network



Within the NETCET project it's also foreseen to establish an Adriatic City Network; the aim is to raise the awareness of the cities on their role for the conservation of the sea turtles and cetaceans. The Adriatic Cities, which intend to participate into this Network, will have to commit themselves to make clear for the general public the threats for these endangered species and proceed to reduce directly the risks for this marine animals (for example promoting the speed reduction of the boats in the area with cetaceans and sea turtles).

To create a more concrete collaboration, the members of the NETCET City Networks will be also invited to sign an official commitment and in conjunction with the Final Conference of the NETCET Project (Venice,

July 2015) they will take part in a proper Workshop to share their experiences and the future projects

Marco Affronte – for the Technical Network

Anna Zarotti – for the City Network

### 3. How can we help a stranded or injured sea turtle?



The NETCET project aims to reduce the current level of threats to the sea turtle and cetacean populations in the Adriatic Sea.

In the Mediterranean and in the Adriatic the main threat is represented by the mortality consequent to incidental catch in fishing gears. Over 130,000 sea turtles are incidentally caught every year in the Mediterranean, and of these animals over 40,000 die. In the Adriatic, more than 11,000 turtles, probably many more, are incidentally caught every year, mainly by trawl nets, longlines and set nets. Although some animals are successfully transferred to rescue centres, obviously this cannot be done for all the thousands of turtles caught and in many cases it is not even necessary because fishermen can easily save the turtles. This is the reason why the NETCET project, as many others around the world, is informing as many fishermen as possible of the best-practices to adopt on board to release the sea turtles accidentally caught and not seriously injured. Turtles, caught by trawlers or set net, can die due to the forced apnoea; many of them can be found dead or comatose (apparently dead). Comatose turtles will die if released in this condition because they cannot swim to the

surface to breathe; however they can recover if the fisherman keeps them on the deck for a while, possibly with the back higher than the head (this facilitates expelling water from the lungs), and release them when they are active again. Turtles caught by longlines are found apparently in good conditions, but many of them will die shortly for the ingested line and hook. However, most of these deaths can be avoided if the fisherman removes the hook, if in the mouth, or at least cut the line very short before releasing the turtle. The line has been proven to be even more dangerous than the hook, because it is ingested and cuts or deforms the intestine, causing a slow and terrible death. Even relatively short tract of lines (e.g. 50 cm) can be lethal. Therefore, with just simple treatments fishermen can make a big difference for turtle survival. In order to inform and involve Adriatic fishermen, the NETCET project has created one poster describing what to do in case a turtle is caught by a trawl net, a set net or a longline. These poster will be posted-up in the main ports of the Adriatic. In addition, the same information, simplified through apposite drawings, appear on stickers and t-shirts; this material, produced by the project, will be distributed during specific meetings with fishermen.

Many turtles are also found along the coast, dead or nearly dead, as a consequence of interaction with fishing gear, collision with boats (and this is the subject of another awareness campaign of the project) and other reasons. If promptly brought to a rescue centre these animals can probably be saved. Therefore the NETCET project is informing the general public about who to contact in these cases. The best option is always to contact the nearest Coast Guard office, which is in contact with turtle rescue centres in the area. In the meanwhile, the turtle should be kept wet, especially the head and eyes, using sea water, and in summer it should be put in shadow, otherwise its temperature would increase to lethal levels.

Paolo Casael , WWF Italy



#### **4. The Workshop “Setting up and operating of the emergency/rescue centers for Sea Turtles and Cetaceans ” Riccione (Italy) – February 2013**



On 21st -23rd February 2013 a workshop focused on setting up and operating of the emergency/rescue centres for sea turtles and Cetaceans was held in Riccione (RN), Italy. The seminar was organized by the Cetacea Foundation with the support of the University of Padova and WWF-Italy. The workshop aimed to strengthen the institutional capacity for the immediate and proper treatment of stranded/injured sea turtles and cetaceans, focusing on the currently adopted action protocols.

The seminar's lectures presented the applied techniques to recover these species and also the veterinary practices for the first aid or the diagnosis. Furthermore the Cetacean Foundation Centre was taken as an example to explain how correctly organize and manage a Rescue Centre for sea turtles.

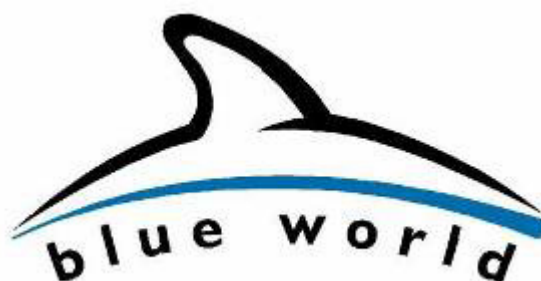
In addition the relevance of the cooperation between the Rescue Centres and the Regional Networks which work for the protection of the sea turtles and cetaceans was mentioned; at the end of the workshop an interesting debate underlined how the Rescue Centres can be considered a useful instrument for the awareness raising campaigns on the presence of the cetaceans and sea turtles in our Sea. In fact the Rescue Centres have a close connection with many of the actors directly involved in the life of these endangered species: general public, Research Institute, Fishermen, etc.

Within the *Dissemination section* of the NETCET website You can find the report of this Workshop. For further details please feel free to contact the lecturers though the Fondazione Cetacea - e-mail address: [educazione@fondazionecetacea.org](mailto:educazione@fondazionecetacea.org)

Valeria Angelini, Fondazione Cetacea Onlus

#### **5. The Workshop “monitoring survey methods for cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic” Losinj (Croatia), March 2013**

Between the 20th and the 22nd of March 2013 the Blue World Institute hosted the workshop on the monitoring survey methods for cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic. The course was developed to provide consistency between the Netcet partners in developing monitoring systems and protocols for the conservation of cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic Sea. These are migratory species moving between the Adriatic States hence the development of consistent monitoring will aid their conservation utilising a more holistic approach to protection. On the first day, an overview of the Adriatic Sea region and potential for development of further projects related to the aims of the NETCET project were presented. The aims and objectives of the monitoring programmes were presented including a review of the potential cetacean and sea turtle species that could be found in the Adriatic Sea.



Day two commenced with greater details on cetacean research including research methods and threats to these animals within the Adriatic Sea. The afternoon session included a technical analysis methods workshop including a review of the programme 'light-room' which will be used in analysis of the data for the

project. Day three looked at logistics, protocols and methods of undertaking aerial surveys for cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic, highlighting all of the potential issues around developing research through this technique. From this workshop it was concluded that many of the cooperative monitoring schemes could be activated according to the availability of trained partners over the coming months.

Within the *Dissemination section* of the NETCET website You can find the report of the Losinj Workshop.

From theory to practice, in June 2013 the boat surveys for cetaceans within the territorial waters of the Republic of Montenegro commenced with members of the BWI working in close cooperation with the partners from IMB. These surveys will provide the first data on the presence of cetaceans in the region. Further surveys for the region of Albania will be undertaken in the spring of 2014. The aerial survey is scheduled to take place in July – August 2013 depending on the available personnel and the completion of logistics. The survey will be coordinated by ISPRA with BWI as a partner with other organizations from the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

For further details on the monitoring progress please feel free to contact the Blue World Institute website, or through [info@blue-world.org](mailto:info@blue-world.org).

Petrer Mackelworth, Blue World Institute

## 6. The NETCET veterinary training courses in Italy and Croatia – May and June 2013



**CORSO DI FORMAZIONE PER VETERINARI IN GESTIONE E CONSERVAZIONE DI CETACEI E TARTARUGHE MARINE NELL'ALTO ADRIATICO**

**13-17 Maggio 2013**  
 Agripolis - Aula 15 Pentagono  
 Viale dell'Università 16  
 LEGNARO (PD)

**CETACEI**  
 Lun.13 (9:00-17:00): Anatomia, Fisiologia, Biologia-Etologia, Malattie Infettive e Parassitologia  
 Mart.14 (9:00-17:00): Tossicologia, Patologia e Clinica  
 Merc.15 (9:00-17:00): Normativa comunitaria, Impatto antropico, Zoonosi e Biosicurezza, Gestione dei Volontari, Biologia dell'Adriatico e parte pratica in campo

**TARTARUGHE MARINE**  
 Merc.15 (9:00-17:00): Normativa comunitaria, Impatto antropico, Zoonosi e Biosicurezza, Gestione dei Volontari, Biologia dell'Adriatico e delle Tartarughe, Anatomia e Fisiologia  
 Giov.16 (9:00-17:00): Farmaco-tossicologia, Microbiologia, Parassitologia, Clinica Medica  
 Ven.17 (9:00-17:00): Clinica Chirurgica, Patologia e Necropsia pratica

La partecipazione è gratuita. Poiché sono disponibili 25 posti, sarà considerato l'ordine d'arrivo delle iscrizioni. Le richieste dovranno pervenire alla mail [mammiferi@netcet.eu](mailto:mammiferi@netcet.eu) indicando il proprio nominativo, afferenza, titolo di studio, professione, contatti telefonici ed indirizzo e-mail. Sarete contattati con programma definitivo e indicazioni logistiche.  
 Per info: [crista.centelleghe@studenti.unipd.it](mailto:crista.centelleghe@studenti.unipd.it)

Questo volantino è stato prodotto con il contributo finanziario del Programma di cooperazione Transfrontaliera IPA Adriatico. I contenuti di questo volantino sono di esclusiva responsabilità dell'Università degli Studi di Padova e in nessun caso riflettono la posizione delle Autorità del Programma di cooperazione Transfrontaliera IPA Adriatico.



this training about 120 people, veterinarians and professionals in the field, were updated on the biological aspects and specific medical techniques concerning cetaceans and turtles. The trainings, lasting for a week, have been tailored on the territorial needs of the various countries bordering the Adriatic Sea; the aim was to disseminate the knowledge acquired over the years by the University of Padua (Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science) and the University of Bari (Department of Veterinary Medicine), maintaining an open-minded position and sharing opinions with the participants. A section of all the courses was dedicated to carry out some practical procedures, involving also some students of veterinary medicine.

General information on the ecology of the Adriatic were provided to the participants with also an overview on the laws concerning these species. The participants were updated on the biology, anatomy and physiology of these marine vertebrates; during the courses, the lecturers provided information about the pathologies of sea turtles and cetaceans and the major problems caused by the human activities to these species (e.g. fishing or the sound sources); finally, the main procedures of first aid and release into the sea were shown. After this basic training, the two departments will give a remotely ongoing support. Now veterinarians are ready to work in the field.

From May to June 2013, through the NETCET project, three veterinary courses were organized in Padua (IT), Rijeka (CRO) and Bari (IT); during

Sandro Mazzariol, University of Padua

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Next partner meeting in Koper – September 2013



The next partner meeting will be held in Koper (Slovenia) in September 2013, followed by the first course on “handling, recovering and recording accidentally caught or stranded sea turtles/cetaceans for non professionals”. By December 2013 other 3 courses will be organized in Padua (Italy), Rijeka (Croatia) and Patok (Albania).



The project is co-funded by the European Union,  
Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.



## Contact

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This Newsletter has been produced with the financial assistance of the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. The contents of this Newsletter are the sole responsibility of the City of Venice and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Authorities.