

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.adriaticpacbc.org

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NETCET in a nutshell



The Adriatic sea hosts several species of cetaceans and sea turtles and is considered a key foraging and development area for young sea turtles. Unfortunately cetaceans and sea turtles are vulnerable to interactions with human activities especially related to fisheries and coastal tourism (e.g. impacts with recreational boats).

The main objective of the NETCET project is to develop common strategies for the conservation of cetaceans and sea turtles in the Adriatic through regional cooperation (pan-Adriatic cooperation). Cetaceans and sea turtles are a shared endangered natural heritage which cannot be managed by a single state in isolation. Due to the migratory

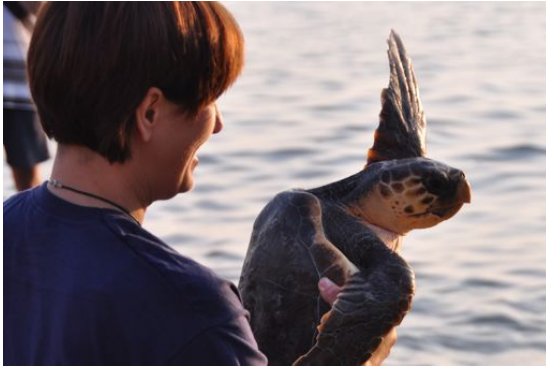
nature of these species and the joint responsibility of Adriatic states, collaboration is essential to planning effective long-term conservation strategies.

At the end of the project, the working team aim to achieve the following results:

- Shared **standardized scientific knowledge and effective collaboration** between the organisations involved in cetaceans and sea turtles conservation in the Adriatic;
- **Greater institutional capacity for the conservation of cetaceans and sea turtles** in partner states;
- **Improved knowledge of Adriatic cetaceans and sea turtles** populations, hot-spots and major threats;
- **Increased technical capacity for sea turtle recovery in the Adriatic** and effective treatment of stranded/injured sea turtles in high level structures and increased information available for citizens through the centers;
- **Increased coastal communities' awareness of the presence and conservation needs of these species** and widespread adoption by fishermen of correct handling procedures;
- Improved conservation and management of cetaceans/sea turtles and their habitats in the Adriatic through **effective regional cooperation**;
- **A sense of ownership** towards and pride in the natural heritage in the Adriatic

The NETCET project runs from October 2012 to September 2015.

The NETCET partnership



Marine biodiversity conservation problems and more specifically cetaceans and sea turtles conservation issues are common to all countries across the Adriatic but experience across regions in this field varies, and there is thus much to be gained by bringing together best practice and experience with the aim of defining a common conservation framework and tools/measures for the conservation of endangered marine species, making these tools readily available to other regions towards the end of the project.

For these reasons the NETCET project, coordinated by the City of Venice, is managed by 13 partners situated in several Countries of the Adriatic Basin: Italy, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Slovenia.

1. University of Padua - Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science, Italy
2. City of Pescara, Italy
3. Cetacea Foundation, Italy
4. Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research, Italy
5. State Institute for Nature Protection, Croatia
6. Blue Word Institute of Marine Research and Conservation, Croatia
7. Herpetofauna Albanian Society, Albany
8. Association for Protection of Aquatic Wildlife of Albania, Albany
9. Marine Biology Institute in Kotor, Montenegro
10. University of Primorska, Science and Research Centre, Slovenia
11. WWF, Italy
12. Marine Educational centre Pula, Croatia

Associates

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, Slovenia
Veneto Region, Italy
Emilia Romagna Region, Italy
Marche Region, Italy

The Kick-off meeting in Venice, Italy (December 2012)



Regional Cooperation for the conservation of cetaceans and sea turtle in the Adriatic got off the ground in Venice in December 2012 with the official kick-off of the NETCET project, financed by the IPA Adriatic CBC Programme.

The event was opened by Paola Ravenna, City of Venice Manager of European Policies, followed by two intense days of interesting presentations and exchange thanks to the active participation of the highly complementary and competent partnership.

Administrative and financial issues were tackled with the support of the IPA Adriatic Programme JTS, followed by discussion aimed at defining the next steps of the project. This focused in particular on the setting up of a NETCET database for sea turtles and cetacean data and on how this will build upon and link up with other existing databases, as well on the procedures for monitoring cetacean and sea turtle stranding along the coast.

The meeting has served to strengthen the partnership, which had already proven to be an excellent team in the proposal stage, and to get our first training activities and local rescue centre preparatory activities off the ground.

The NETCET awareness campaigns to reduce the threats to sea turtles and cetaceans



The NETCET project aims to reduce the current level of threats to the sea turtle and cetacean populations in the Adriatic Sea and part of the problem could be solved if just more people were aware of it. For this reason, NETCET will carry out an extensive awareness campaign for all the people living or frequenting the coasts of five Adriatic countries: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Albania.

Cetaceans and turtles are threatened by many factors, but the project will specifically address two among the most important in the Adriatic: fishing and boat traffic. Fishing is particularly harmful for sea turtles, that are incidentally captured in fishing

gears such as longlines, trawl nets, and set nests. Longlines target pelagic fish such as tuna and swordfish, that are captured by putting at sea hundreds of hooks with a bait on. Unfortunately, turtles frequenting the Adriatic (mainly *Caretta caretta*) are carnivorous and are attracted by the bait too, usually fish or squids. This is why this fishing gear captures high numbers of turtles. Although they are usually released still alive by the fisherman, the ingested line and hook will eventually kill many of them in hours or days. 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 cut or deforms the intestine, causing a slow and terrible death.

Differently, turtles caught by trawlers can die because of forced apnea and drowning. Trawl nets are like huge sacks pulled by the boat and they catch all they encounter along their tracks, including turtles. Since turtles are air-breathers, they cannot survive for long in the net. When the net is opened releasing all the catch on the deck, turtles can be dead or comatose (apparently dead). Comatose turtles will die if released in this condition but they can recover if the fisherman keep them on the deck for a while.

Therefore, with just simple treatments fishermen can make a big difference for turtle survival and the project aims to inform as many fishermen as possible. Meetings will be organized and specific posters, t-shirts and stickers will be distributed to fishermen around the Adriatic in order to provide them with these simple procedures.

Boat collision is the other threat specifically addressed by the project. The impact of a boat keel or propeller can either kill a cetacean or a turtle immediately or cause important and invaliding injuries. Although maritime traffic is an important way of transport for goods and people and cannot be easily modified, leisure traffic is less fundamental for humans and boats can be driven very fast just for fun. The project aims to inform the boat owners about the potential threat their driving can represent to marine animals and, through posters and meetings, will invite them to drive slower, at least in specific areas.

Many turtles are found at sea or along the coast as the consequence of human activities, such as fishing, boat traffic and pollution. Some of these animals are very lucky and are found in time to be rehabilitated in rescue centers. The release of these animals will be an excellent opportunity to communicate with local people or tourists and to speak about the problems that we are causing to cetaceans/sea turtles and the solutions available at the moment. NETCET will organize special release events and will spread this information through mass-media, in order to inform as many people as possible. For such a project, a very important part of the population is represented by children. Children are very interested in animals and are sympathetic to their problems, they are excellent ambassadors of these issues at their family and friends, and they are the next generation that can make a difference. Therefore, NETCET will specifically inform Adriatic children by lectures at schools and information kits for schoolchildren.

Paolo Casale, WWF Italia



21-23/02/2013

Rescue Centre - Workshop in Riccione - February 2013

From the 21st to the 23rd of February 2013, the Cetacea Foundation will be hosting participants from across the Adriatic in a workshop aimed at strengthening institutional capacity for the immediate and proper treatment of sea turtles with a rich programme provided by Cetacea Foundation, University of Padova and WWF-Italy



18-21/03/2013

Next partnermeeting in Losinj - March 2013

The next partner meeting will be in Losinj in March 2013, followed by another intensive training workshop on monitoring and survey methods which aims to prepare the NETCET participants for the aerial survey, photo ID survey and the satellite tagging, all important activities which are coming up in the project.



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