

DELPHINPOST

English concise version
of GRD's member magazine

www.delphinschutz.org

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Rettung der Delphine/GRD
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Dolphin Conservation in Croatia: teamwork pays off

Be it among people or among dolphins – by joining forces more can be accomplished than by acting alone, as some of this year's incidents have shown: be it responsible interaction with cetaceans, the establishment of a dolphin conservation center, or a rescue action among dolphins!



Bottlenose dolphins off Ugljan island. © M. Duras

Last summer we were contacted for help by a German tourist in Croatia. She had repeatedly observed a pleasure boat disturbing dolphins: "In the late afternoon a boat fully loaded with tourists went full speed right into a group of dolphins. A lady aboard asked her guests in several languages to shout at the top of their voices because the dolphins would like this. The people started to scream and shout. It was so awful. The boat then started to circle around the dolphins full speed, without regard to the dolphins and to the four or five boats watching the dolphins with their engines turned off. The pleasure boat "cornered" the dolphins and generated big waves. The lady then explained that the animals would greatly enjoy this."

Well-intentioned is not always well done ...

This kind of behavior is extremely dangerous for both tourists and dolphins alike. We reported this incident to our Croatian partners and warned other tourists via Facebook from booking a trip on this boat.

The tourist guide contacted us, being completely surprised that this kind of behavior was harmful to dolphins. She loved dolphins, she said. However, she got our point and promised that this would not happen again. The operator will still have to expect consequences for violating Croatian conservation laws, because this incident was also brought to the attention of the local conservation authority.

Sighting of a rare Mediterranean monk seal on the island of Cres

Another case of rude misbehavior vis-à-vis wild animals was observed on the island of Cres. Pleasure boat tourists on shore happened to encounter a rare Mediterranean monk seal at the beach. Instead of observing it from a safe distance, the men scared the animal up and tried to hinder it from reaching the water, as can be seen on a video (please check our website:

<http://www.delphinschutz.org/projekte/rettung-der-letzten-adria-delfine/delfin-und-walarten-in-der-adria>).

All marine mammals are strictly protected in Croatia. Killing, harming, or disturbing them is subject to fines of about 5,000 Euros.

The Mediterranean monk seal has been considered regionally extinct in the Adriatic Sea since the mid-1980s even if rare sightings of individuals have been reported in the past years. In its entire range (Mediterranean, adjoining seas, and North African Atlantic coasts) there are only between 350 and 450 individuals of this critically endangered species left.



A dolphin hater downright riddled this male bottlenose dolphin with bullets. He died a slow and cruel death.
© M. Duras

By force of arms

A bottlenose dolphin stood no chance when it came near an armed dolphin hater who downright riddled the dolphin with bullets. The porter of a hotel near the Istrian harbor of Porec aptly named "Dolphin" discovered the dead body off the Hotel's beach last September. The necropsy yielded 7 pellets in the animal's chest. The adult dolphin was a male of 3 m length and 227 kg of weight. He had slowly and painfully bled to death. The results of the examination suggest that the dolphin was killed in the area where he was discovered. The police started an investigation against a person unknown. However, the chances of finding the criminal are rather small.

It is not the first time that a bottlenose dolphin was doomed by its friendly and curious behavior. They often approach boats and humans quite gregariously. In the past five years three dolphins shot to death were found in Istria alone, the estimated number of unknown cases is likely to be much higher.

Dolphins helping each other

But there is also good news from Croatia. A German couple sailing with their boat in the northern Adriatic Sea witnessed a dramatic and moving incident of cooperation and empathy among dolphins. "Off Cres, we suddenly saw a rapidly moving fishing marker buoy and heard a dolphin screaming. It must just have gotten entangled in the net, tearing the buoy very quickly behind it. Another dolphin came to the rescue and together they managed to free the entrapped animal. They both moved off southwards along the coast. We were so relieved!" the woman wrote to us.



An entangled dolphin is tearing a fishing marker buoy behind itself. With the help of a second dolphin it got free again.
© S. Gamauf

Dolphin Conservation Center – Opening next year

We are pleased to soon reach another mile stone in Croatian dolphin conservation. Thanks to the support of our innumerable supporters and dolphin adopters we were able to complete the renovation work at the main building of our future Dolphin Conservation Center by the end of 2012. It is located in the village of Molat on the island of Molat and its official opening is planned for early summer 2013; further details will be published via newsletter and our website.



The renovation work on the main building of our future Dolphin Conservation Center on the island of Molat was completed by the end of 2012. © U. Kirsch

The Center will serve as a permanent base for the systematic research and field work, allowing fast action in the case of emergency situations (entanglement of dolphins in nets, stranding of dolphins on land, etc.). It will also play a key role in promoting ecological awareness through exhibitions, lectures and presentations to the public.

Together we stand strong

All these incidents show how vital our joint efforts are to make sure that the small population of bottlenose dolphins left in the Croatian Part of the Adriatic Sea will survive in the long run. If wrong or harmful behavior during interactions with dolphins is immediately reported to us we can stop it in time and, with a bit of luck, sue the culprit.

Reports in the media sensitize the public at large about marine mammals and their habitats. And maybe, one day, even the “dolphin haters” will understand what treasure lies at their doormat.

The Dolphin Conservation Center is also an achievement of our joint efforts – because we would not be where we are without your support!

We thank all our supporters and donors for their contributions towards the conservation of the endangered Adriatic dolphins. We owe our accomplishments in dolphin conservation to you!

Ulrike Kirsch

Please report your whale or dolphin sighting

We encourage holidaymakers in Croatia to notify us if they see a marine mammal. The sighting form and the **Code of Conduct** about responsible behavior during encounters with whales and dolphins in the wild can be found at:

<http://www.delphinschutz.org/projects/save-the-last-adriatic-dolphins>

And here you can find the sighting form in English:

<http://www.delphinschutz.org/informationmaterial/schutzprojekt-adria/Delfinsichtungsbogen-englisch.pdf>



Our partners Martina Duras and Tom Gomerčič and their team are landing in a harbor on the island of Murter after accomplishing their field work.
© U. Karłowski

Save the last Adriatic Dolphins

Some 220 bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are living in the Croatian part of the Adriatic Sea. After the extinction of the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) and the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), bottlenose dolphins are the only marine mammals still living in the Adriatic Sea. The dolphins are facing threats from entanglement in fishing nets, overfishing, deliberate killing, and high-speed watercraft. 50 per cent of the dead cetaceans found along Croatian coasts die from human impacts.

Together with veterinary faculty members of Zagreb University and the organization VAL (www.val-nature.hr), GRD wants to ensure the marine mammals' long-term survival in this habitat.

You can help! Every donation counts to bring this project to fruition! All “Adopt a dolphin” contributions are strictly allocated to this project. Donations indicating “center” will be strictly allocated to the construction/renovation of the marine mammal research and conservation center on the island of Molat.



Bottlenose dolphin
© M. Duras