

# DELPHINPOST

MEMBER MAGAZINE - ENGLISH CONCISE VERSION  
GESELLSCHAFT ZUR RETTUNG DER DELPHINE E.V. (GRD)/  
SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF DOLPHINS, GERMANY  
ISSUE 2-2013



## Save the Last Adriatic Dolphins Inauguration of our dolphin conservation center in Croatia

By *Ulrike Kirsch*

The Fourth of July is a special day for us too – because this is the day we celebrated the inauguration of our Dolphin Conservation Center on the northern Dalmatian island of Molat in Croatia together with our partners of Zagreb University and the Croatian NGO VAL.

The 40 something guests included journalists as well as representatives of agencies and institutions in Zagreb, Zadar, and the island of Molat. The locals were also very much interested in this new facility on their island. “We are supporting this initiative and are very happy that it’s based here in our community,” says Denis Mračić, president of the local council, to the Croatian TV channel HRT 1, who documented the inauguration.

With a solemn ribbon-cutting ceremony we officially opened the Center. Then project member Martina Đuras led a tour through the buildings, followed by a brief presentation by project staff member Tom Gomerčić about the German-Croatian project to “Save the last Adriatic Dolphins” from its beginnings in 1999 until today.

So far, the Center is just minimally equipped with the most basic items, as is the “info corner” with its posters, brochures, and a bottlenose dolphin skull. Some other things, including work stations and working equipment are still lacking.

The Center is an important milestone in our efforts to save the last dolphins in Croatia. It is ideally located in northern Dalmatia to serve as a permanent base for the fieldwork and as an information center for locals and tourists to learn more about the marine mammals living in the Croatian waters.

**A big thank you to all of our supporters who helped us to achieve this important objective!**

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Inauguration of our Dolphin Conservation Center on the island of Molat. © U. Kirsch



The solemn ribbon-cutting ceremony. © U. Karlowski



So far, the “info corner” contains just some basic exhibition items. There is more to come. © U. Karlowski

## Save the Last Adriatic Dolphins-- cont. Rescue operation for severely injured dolphin

In September, a complex rescue capture was set up by our project partners under the lead of veterinarian Dr. Tom Gomerčić to free a severely injured dolphin from fishing lines and treat its injuries. The bottlenose dolphin was named Košara after a small island in the vicinity of which it was repeatedly observed. It was originally discovered by a German tourist who reported her sighting to us within the framework of our dolphin sighting scheme in the Croatian part of the Adriatic Sea.

The dolphin suffers from severe injuries caused by fishing line entanglement. This must have happened some time ago, and although the animal managed to free itself, some lines got stuck, cutting deep into its body and growing into the tissue. The dolphin shows inflammations at its beak, back, and chest. Flesh growths have formed at the inflamed areas. Removing the fishing lines and treating the injuries with antibiotics will be the only chance for this dolphin to survive.

Several attempts were made to encircle the dolphin with a purse seine deployed from a fishing boat, but unfortunately the



*Flesh growths have formed at the inflamed areas where fishing line has cut into the body. © T. Gomerčić*

dolphin kept diving away and disappearing for about thirty minutes from the area each time.

The capture action was called off after many hours and several unsuccessful attempts. The situation was not easy. The specialists had to be careful not to drive the dolphin away from "its" home range where it seemed to feel safe and apparently found enough food. Another capture attempt was planned but could not be realized so far. Since about mid October Košara seems to have left the area.

**Thank you to everybody who supported our capture attempt to save Košara the dolphin with a donation! You have made the rescue attempt possible!**

Some 220 bottlenose dolphins are living in the Croatian part of the Adriatic Sea year round—the only marine mammals surviving in the Adriatic Sea, which once was home to a great number of dolphins and different species. We want to save the dolphins from extinction and protect their habitats! Please help now!

Every donation counts! Check out our website for more information:

[www.delphinschutz.org/save-the-last-adriatic-dolphins](http://www.delphinschutz.org/save-the-last-adriatic-dolphins)

### Victims of human activities

Sadly, several incidences last summer show how far we still have to go to provide effective protection for the small dolphin population in Croatia.

#### Taken apart!

In August, a mutilated bottlenose dolphin was found dead at the Istrian west coast near the city of Pula. It had its flukes and dorsal fin cut off in an expert manner and removed all of its back muscles. Our project partner and veterinarian Dr. Martina Đuras assumes that the dolphin drowned in a fishing net, then fishermen cut its fins to remove it from the net. The back muscles seem to have been removed to serve as fishing bait or even for human consumption, since dolphin meat used to be eaten in Istria and on the island of Hvar in former times.

#### Harpooned!

A bottlenose dolphin was observed near the island of Olib in late August, with a 1 m metal harpoon sticking in its back just

in front of the dorsal fin. It seems that its curious and friendly nature typical of bottlenose dolphins made it an easy prey: Judging from the shooting angle someone presumably shot it while it was bow riding. Since the harpoon did not enter deeply into the dolphin's body the harpoon seems to have dropped off. On September 19, the dolphin known by photo-identification was seen again near Olib island – the harpoon was gone!

#### Shot to death with a semi-automatic weapon!

A halfway decayed dolphin was found ashore on the island of Sv. Juraj near the west Istrian port of Vrsar in mid September. It had been perfidiously killed with a semi-automatic weapon.

**It is quite scary to know that the waters along the Croatian coasts, which are so popular with boaters, divers and tourists in general, are also frequented by people who carry dangerous weapons on board and do not hesitate to use them!**