

Project to save the last Adriatic dolphins

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 species. We want to save them from extinction and protect their habitats!

2014 sighting scheme

We are pleased about the many contributions we received in 2014 from people who reported us their dolphin sightings or other interesting incidents. The observations included bottlenose dolphins, a species living year-round in Croatian coastal waters, but also whales, sea turtles, Mediterranean monk seals, a shark, and an interesting skeleton.

Mysterious skeleton on sea floor

A Swiss tourist was quite surprised when she found the remainders of an animal skeleton on the sea floor while snorkeling off Šolta island in June. She sent us the pictures she had taken and it was soon clear that the skeleton was the remainder of a cetacean. Her host (www.inselurlaub-adria.de)



Bottlenose dolphins off Rab island.
© Jessica Klein

immediately offered to recover the finding in an official mission. A thorough examination convinced our project partner Dr. Martina Đuras, a veterinarian, that this was the skeleton of a Risso's dolphin. This species grows to 4 m in length and 500 kg in weight and occurs only sporadically in the Adriatic Sea.

Sperm whales lost in the Adriatic

Early September, a group of sperm whales entered the waters of the Croatian islands. This was quite a sensation, given that the northern Adriatic is too shallow for these marine mammals which dive up to 3,000 m and more. For this reason these deep divers normally stay in the deeper parts of the Mediterranean. For several days, the group of seven or

more individuals roamed between Mljet, an island about 30 km north west of Dubrovnik, and Molat, an island in northern Dalmatia, which also hosts our Dolphin Conservation Center. Sadly, on September 12 it became evident that some of them had not made it: seven sperm whales stranded north of the Italian port of Vasto. Voluntaries of a stranding network succeeded in returning four animals back into the water. However, three of the whales died. A few weeks later another sperm whale was found dead 200 km further south at the Italian coast.

It is very likely the whales all belonged to the same group. Experts of Padua University are trying to determine the causes of deaths. They want to find out whether the whales died a natural death, or whether military sonar tests or seismic surveys to detect oil and gas deposits in the ocean floor might have played a role.

Pristine beaches at risk

The insatiable greed for the "black gold" does not stop at touristic treasures. The Croatian government had seismic surveys performed in late 2013 to see whether there are any oil and gas deposits in the Adriatic Sea. The first licenses for test drilling are to be issued in 2015; oil and gas exploitation may start by 2019.

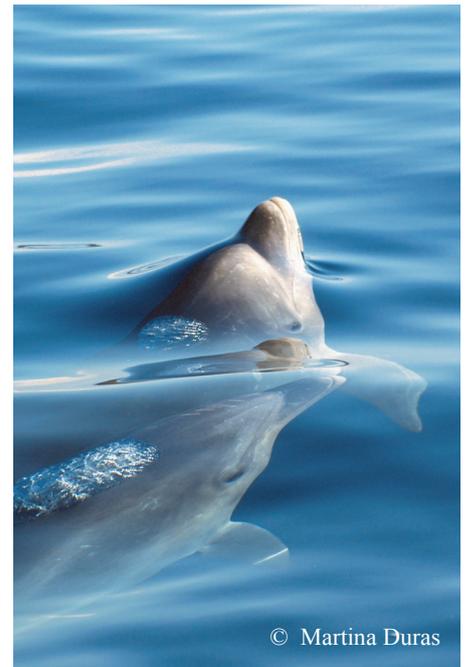
GRD supports an international protest launched by the *Clean Adriatic Sea Alliance* (CASA) against the high-risk offshore drilling plans.



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Please report your dolphin or whale sighting in the Adriatic Sea. Here you can download the Dolphin Sighting Recording Form (PDF):
www.delphinschutz.org/save-the-last-adriatic-dolphins

We thank all of our supporters and donors for their contributions towards the conservation of the endangered Adriatic dolphins. Every donation counts to bring this project to fruition! Your donation enables us to continue and expand our project to save the last Adriatic dolphins. For more information check:
www.delphinschutz.org/save-the-last-adriatic-dolphins



© Martina Đuras

Dolphin Conservation Center

Celebrating its inauguration on the island of Molat in July 2013, our Dolphin Conservation Center went into its first official season in 2014, marking the beginning of a new era for our project to save the last Adriatic dolphins. Both tourists and locals alike came to visit. Dr. Martina Đuras and her colleagues of the Veterinary Faculty of Zagreb University happily showed them around the Center, informing them about the situation of the last Adriatic dolphins and about what we do to protect the marine mammals and their habitats. The Center was open from late June through September with a few interruptions. Next year we want to continue to expand its equipment and the "info corner."

Ulrike Kirsch

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