

# LIFE Conceptu Maris

2022-2026

The negative effects of human activities on cetaceans and sea turtles are increasingly evident and require new conservation strategies. These effects include abandoned fishing gear, traffic and floating plastics. The LIFE Conceptu Maris project (CONservation of Cetaceans and Pelagic Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean: Managing Actions for their Recovery and Sustainability) integrates traditional techniques with cutting-edge technologies to collect new data, particularly in the open sea, on the distribution of these charismatic species and their ecological preferences. Assessing the impact of **risk factors** enables the identification of the **most important sites** in the Mediterranean for their long-term conservation.

The project is initially being conducted across a large area of the southern **Tyrrhenian Sea**. These procedure will then be replicated in the Adriatic and eastern Ionian Seas, the Pelagos Sanctuary and the Spanish cetacean migration corridor north of the **Balearic Islands**.

## The actions

The project aims to increase knowledge about the marine environment by using ferries as research vessels and combining traditional research methods with new technologies.

Analysis of carbon and nitrogen isotopes is used to clarify the structure of the underwater food chain

Detection of environmental DNA (eDNA) dispersed in water by animals

Use of hull sensors installed on ferries to collect environmental data

Monitoring of wildlife, marine debris and maritime traffic from ferries

Citizen science campaigns to encourage public participation in monitoring activities

Training courses for crew members to minimise the risk of collision with large cetaceans

Estimating areas with the highest concentration of floating debris and assessing the risk of entanglement



Photo: Canva



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Photo: CIMA Research Foundation



# Conoscere e proteggere i cetacei e le tartarughe del Mediterraneo in mare aperto



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## The species

The project primarily focuses on the eight most common species of cetacean and the three species of turtle inhabiting the Mediterranean Sea.

 Common species that is often encountered

  Uncommon species that is occasionally encountered

   Rare species that is difficult to spot

Photo: Canva



### Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)



It is the largest species of animal in the Mediterranean. It has a large, dark back and a small dorsal fin. It rarely shows its caudal fin before diving.

It is an open sea species distributed throughout the Mediterranean. When it breathes, it produces two jets of vertical water spray that can be seen from far away.



### Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

It has a robust, dark grey body and an enormous, square head. Its dorsal fin is rounded. Before diving deep, it lifts its caudal fin out of the water.

It inhabits deep waters and is most often seen in the Pelagos Sanctuary. It also visits the Ionian Sea, and less frequently the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic Seas. Its blow remains low and inclined.



### Long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*)



It has an elongated body and an unmistakable globular head. It is ebony black in colour (the young are lighter) and has a distinctive grey-white patch on its chest.

It prefers the open sea and is fairly regularly spotted in the western Mediterranean. It regularly visits the Ligurian Sea and mainly frequents the Pontine Archipelago and the Campania coast in the Tyrrhenian Sea.



### Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*)



It has a tapered head, a very small dorsal fin set back towards the tail, and it swims rather slowly. As it ages, its body accumulates scars from clashes with other males.

It is difficult to observe because it rarely emerges from the water. It is more prevalent in the north-western Ligurian Sea and the central Tyrrhenian Sea, favouring open seas and underwater canyons.



### Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*)

Its unmistakable white-grey colouring due to numerous scars from fights with other members of its species and squid it feeds on. It has a globular head and lacks a rostrum.

It is found in the Ligurian Sea, southern Tyrrhenian Sea and Ionian Sea. In Sicily, it has been sighted around Egadi Islands, Strait of Messina, and along Ionian coast. It mainly frequents deep waters.



### Striped Dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*)



Its dark grey back is clearly distinct from its sides, which are adorned with striking light stripes. It has a falcate dorsal fin and an elongated rostrum with a long, dark beak.

This species is most commonly encountered in the open sea. It is often found in groups of up to 100 individuals, sometimes alongside other species.



### Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*)

It has a streamlined body with ochre-yellow sides bearing a distinctive hourglass pattern. At the base of the dorsal fin, there is a dark grey triangular marking.

It is declining in the Mediterranean. Two subpopulations live in Italy, (Ischia and Lampedusa). Rare sightings in the Ligurian-Provençal basin. It can be spotted in mixed groups with *Stenella* species.



### Tursiops (*Tursiops truncatus*)



La colorazione, grigio fumo sul dorso e grigio chiaro sui fianchi e sul ventre, vira al marrone a seconda della luce. Pinna dorsale a forma di falce, rostro corto e tozzo.

Si avvista soprattutto nelle acque costiere, anche in aree molto antropizzate. A volte si osserva anche in zone pelagiche di mare profondo. Molto agile e veloce, compie evoluzioni acrobatiche.



### Tartaruga caretta (*Caretta caretta*)

Carapace rosso-marrone e testa grande, in proporzione più delle altre specie, con mascelle poderose. Il maschio ha coda più sviluppata e unghie anteriori più lunghe.

È la tartaruga più frequente nel Mediterraneo. Nidifica in varie zone d'Italia, specie in Calabria ionica e Sicilia. In genere passa i primi anni in mare aperto, poi si avvicina alla costa.



### Tartaruga verde (*Chelonia mydas*)



Carapace bruno-olivastro con striature e macchie gialle o marmorizzate. Il piastrone (la parte inferiore) è chiaro. Testa affusolata, in proporzione più piccola della caretta.

Non nidifica in Italia. Occasionalmente vengono avvistati individui giovani, specie lungo le coste pugliesi e calabresi. Essendo una specie tropicale, tollera poco le basse temperature.



### Tartaruga liuto (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

È nero-bluastro con piccole macchie chiare. Il carapace ha 7 creste longitudinali, con placche ossee ricoperte da uno strato di pelle simile al cuoio. Il becco è privo di copertura cornea.

È la più grande tartaruga marina esistente, vive in mare aperto e non nidifica in Italia. I pochi avvistamenti in Mediterraneo sono di individui atlantici passati per lo Stretto di Gibilterra.

