

Project Update: March 2017

March 2017 was marked by extremely successful field expedition with the main goal to study potential nursery grounds and to film natural habitats of the batoids within the Neum bay. The water temperature was 9 to 10°C, while the weather conditions were partly cloudy and sunny with strong winds during every day of the expedition. Our team performed 20 dives (mostly night dives with a few days at afternoon time) using self-contained underwater breathing apparatus with compressed air. Besides, I have used technical diving configurations with double tank on the back and two Nitrox stages in order to extend my maximum time underwater and possibilities to study target taxa. Maximum reached depth was 25 m with visibility less than 1 m at some points.

During our expedition we have encountered four specimens (one adult and three juveniles) of *Torpedo marmorata* Risso, 1880 and one adult specimen of *Raja miraletus* L. Juvenile *Torpedo marmorata* Risso, 1880 have been recorded at the depth of only 4 m, which is the shallowest finding of this species in our state and have scientifically contributed to the knowledge of the basic ecology of this species. Other three samples were located on the drift net - while we have tried, and successfully released one specimen, the other two were already dead and were collected for further pathological analysis. Adult specimen of the *Raja miraletus* L. was one of the largest we have ever encountered. As usual, the animal was calm and friendly which allowed me further close interactions. I have gently inspected any traces of diseases or trauma and have concluded that there is no any signs of diseases, nor prior trauma and I have released the ray in my hands. An interesting fact was that rays have moved only a couple of metres from me and haven't totally escaped from us. Besides the field work, we are working on the pathological analysis of the dead samples collected from fisherman which will be the subject of the April update.



Andej Gajić in the technical diving configuration using double tanks and Nitrox Sidemount stages, returning from a research dive in the Neum bay.



Juvenile specimen of the *Torpedo marmorata* Risso, 1880 filmed using GoPro Hero V at the nursery ground in shallow coastal waters of the continental part of the Neum bay.



Adults specimen of the *Raja miraletus* L., resting at the muddy bottom on 20 meters depth, recorded during the night dive.