

Project Update: December 2019

European Environmental Agency meeting (Copenhagen, Denmark)

At the beginning of the projects, I have been nominated and appointed by the NFP within the Ministry for Environment and Tourism to fully represent Bosnia and Herzegovina at the European Environmental Association EIONET NRC meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark. This was an extremely important recognition for my previous work in the fields of research and conservation of sharks, skates and rays in the eastern Adriatic. The goals for this meeting was to update and a discussion on on-going and planned marine activities by EEA and its European Topic Centre for Inland, coastal and marine waters, the European Commission, the EEA member countries and international organisations. During the meeting, I have addressed to the representatives of over 20 European countries, which was the first time that Bosnian representative lectured such important event. I have pointed out all the work we are doing for the past decade with an emphasis on the project „Let's Create a Better Future for Sharks, Skates and Rays in the Eastern Adriatic“. Shortly after my speech, I had several informal meetings with the representatives of Slovenia and United Kingdom, who offered help to achieve goals presented in my presentation. Besides, I have also discussed an official partnership with the National Environmental Agency of Albania - which would be extremely important for the continuation of this project and possibly establishing Red list of elasmobranchs in the Albanian waters, together with the accompanying legal protection of threatened species.



Andrej's speech during the European Environmental Agency EIONET NRC meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark.

IUCN Red List Assessor Training by UNEP (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Furthermore, based on the nomination from the federal ministry, I have been selected as one of the 30 national experts to participate in the official IUCN Red List Assessor training organised by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such training has significantly contributed to my skills and empowered me to make accurate red list assessments of sharks, skates and rays at both local and regional scales. Thus, I will carefully revise the proposed Red List for elasmobranchs in Neum-Klek and Malostonski bay; as well as other local/regional list(s) important for the success of this project.



Andrej's practical presentation at the IUCN Red List Assessor training in the United Nations house in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. © IUNC.

Laboratory analysis on smoothhound sharks (Neum-Klek and Malostonski bay)

When it comes to the laboratory work, I am still analysing the current degree of adaptations of smoothhound sharks, *Mustelus mustelus* (L.), *Mustelus asterias* Cloquet, 1821 and *Mustelus punctulatus* Risso, 1827 in the waters of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Neum-Klek and Malostonski bay). This study is primarily based on the comparative functional anatomy of closely related taxa with regard to the diseases caused by certain type of pollution (microplastics, heavy metals and war waste) both in pre-natal, juvenile and adult stage. It's worth emphasising that this is the very first study in the Mediterranean region, which aims to understand both intraspecies relations within the representatives of the genus and health status in different life stages.



Embryos of the *Mustelus punctulatus* A. Risso, 1827 obtained from gravid by-catch specimen from the Malostonski bay. Current studies include functional anatomy, pathohistology and odontology. © A. Gajić / Sharklab ADRIA.

Research and meetings with stakeholders in Montenegro

Our work in Montenegro started with very successful meetings with Natural History Association of Montenegro. This partner organisation will support our efforts and help up achieve project goals. As I still have more samples to be studied than expected, I had to postpone the certain field and laboratory analysis on the by-catch samples from the territorial waters of Montenegro. This planned studies will most likely happen at the end of January or in February 2020 – depending primarily on the available material and conditions.

Other project activities

Our portal, as one of the key project outputs, is under heavy construction and we are both grouping and mapping past and current sighting of sharks, skates and rays – along the eastern Adriatic coast. Due to comprehensive work during the second half of October, entire November and December 2019 I had to reschedule the workshop/lectures planned in December to the beginning of the next year.