

## Final Evaluation Report

---

| Your Details               |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Full Name</b>           | Natasa Nikpaljevic   |
| <b>Project Title</b>       | Turning Paper Results into Conservation Outputs for Marine Top Predator Protection in Montenegro |
| <b>Application ID</b>      | 35446-B  |
| <b>Date of this Report</b> | November 2022  |

**1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.**

| Objective   | Not achieved | Partially achieved | Fully achieved | Comments  |
|---|--------------|--------------------|----------------|---|
| Increasing understanding of bottlenose dolphins in the coastal waters of Montenegro based on observations         |              |                    |                | The critical data on bottlenose dolphins and the main threat such as marine traffic, were collected along the coastline of Montenegro throughout the year with a total survey effort of 66 days, according to the data collected between 4 <sup>th</sup> March and 8 <sup>th</sup> August 2022. Results of the study revealed the presence of bottlenose dolphins along the coast, as well as the intense marine traffic, especially in the summer months in Utjeha, Bar and Boka Bay (personal observation). |
| Increasing understanding of bottlenose dolphins in the coastal waters of Montenegro based on acoustic information |              |                    |                | Acoustic information was collected on each boat survey during this project. Most of the time bottlenose dolphins used clicks linked with feeding behaviour, especially while following the trawlers as it was seen many times during the boat observations. The acoustic information helped in many ways in understanding bottlenose dolphin ecology and habitat usage along the coast of Montenegro.   |
| Enhancing local research capacity   |              |                    |                | Even though data has been mainly collected by international students, one student from Montenegro have joined to the project activities as well. He was more focused on social media and spreading word to the local community.   |
| Citizen science activities  |              |                    |                | During the project, we have posted our activities on our first citizen – science activity, a Facebook page named Montenegro Sighting Network, where local community had an opportunity to follow our project activities as well as to give their own  |

|                              |  |  |  |  |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
|                              |  |  |  | contribution by sharing with us dolphin sightings along the coast.   |
| Public outreach activities   |  |  |  | During this project we have organised seven presentations in schools and one presentation for the project of NGO Our Action named as "Youth for a clean Adriatic" where we spoke about cetacean species in the Adriatic as well as about threats they are facing in Montenegro and why our research is important, but also the importance of the local community in the conservation of marine ecosystem. Also, we have attended two conferences, the 33rd Conference of the European Cetacean Society and 2nd International Conference for Adriatic Biodiversity Protection organised in Kotor, Montenegro, where we shared our results. Besides, we have organised meetings with German community in Bar where we shared our knowledge and spoke about the importance of implementing better conservation measures for cetacean species in the Adriatic and have participated in BioTours Youth Camp. Additionally, during the past year, we have been invited to give an interview by many local TV emissions and journals. |
| Institutional collaborations |  |  |  | We have developed a relationship with NGOs, such as Our Action and EnvPro, as well as with different schools in Bar, Budva and Tivat where we held presentations on marine mammal conservation.  |
| Development of Action Plan   |  |  |  | We have started to work on the Action Plan for which we will use all data since 2016, including data collected until the end of this project. After analysing and evaluating data collected for the past 6 years, together with assessment of threats and interaction between marine mammals and human pressure, especially before, during and after COVID pandemic, the results will be   |

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  | shared with competent institutions and local communities. Having strong conclusions coming from the effort which last for the past 6 years, we hope that the procedure will come to an end with the official establishment of an Action Plan. |
|--|--|--|---|

**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

With support of the Rufford Foundation, not only in the past year but also in the past few years, we continued with data collection on cetaceans in Montenegro, which helped us to understand what has changed over years but also to gain more information about them. The most important outcomes are:

**1.** Data collection on bottlenose dolphins for the past 6 years, provides an important scientific data. The scientific data, collected during this project, represents a key component for further conservation strategies. Decline of bottlenose dolphin population in the Montenegrin waters in 2019 was worrying, but with the continuous dedicated surveys we carried out in Montenegro, we learnt that the population slightly increased to 27% in 2020 and in 2021 reached up to 47%, according to the data collected until 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021, what might be due to the significantly reduced marine traffic and removal of the hydrocarbon platform.

**2.** In the past 2 years, the government have approved three MPAs in Montenegro named as Old Ulcinj, Katic and Platamuni. Therefore, this study targeted additional survey efforts and data on bottlenose dolphins was also collected within the zones of these areas, which represents a very important scientific knowledge what will be used for better management of MPAs, but not only for that, also for the faster establishment of the Action Plan.

**3.** During this project we have developed relationship with NGOs and many schools in Montenegro, which lead to more involvement of local community than in the past, which gives a hope that people will get more involved in the future and that we will work together on the conservation of marine ecosystem. Further, we have carried out both national and international actions to spread the knowledge on marine mammals in Montenegro, where the results of our study were presented on BioTours Youth Camp and 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference for Adriatic Biodiversity Protection organised in Montenegro as well as on the 33<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the European Cetacean Society.

**3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.**

We wanted to organise many meetings with stakeholders and institutions and to share our results and knowledge about dolphins in Montenegrin waters in aim to develop an action plan at the end of this project, but we have just participated and organised some of them. We have participated in BioTours Youth Camp and have held a presentation during which we have shared our results and have discussed

about the blue economy and sustainability with the IPC Tehnopolis, a very important business development service in Montenegro, participants from the Institute of Marine Biology from Kotor, Jonian Dolphin Conservation from Italy, fishermen, divers and other citizens from Montenegro. Besides, we have organised a meeting with German community in Bar and have organised one meeting with Environment Protection Agency from Montenegro, but a bit later than it was scheduled due to many duties and work that agency has had. Also, with big changes in prices since March / April 2022, the cost of everything raised a lot what restricted us to do more than we wanted.

#### **4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.**

During this project we held many presentations, some in collaboration with NGO "Our Action" and some in primary schools along the coast of Montenegro, what showed us a big interest coming from all of them and especially from school professors, who were very keen to listen about our research, the results, importance of the cetaceans for marine ecosystem and threats they face as well as how we all can help their conservation. Teaching pupils about the topic was a very important step, as the professors underlined too, because it all starts with their education and depends on it, too. Therefore, they were very interested to continue collaboration with us.

Further, we continued with a collaboration with fishermen, whose boats, along the coast, we rent for our boat surveys and with who we speak very often about dolphin sighting, what they were very happy to share with us, especially when we are not in that area, what we are very thankful for.

#### **5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

Since this has been our third project on marine mammal research in Montenegro, it showed us the importance of continuous work on it, even though it is not easy and depends on many factors. During all these years, with constant work, we could follow all changes in dolphin population, their abundance and residency, which helped us to have stronger conclusions and to go further such as working to officially establish an action plan.

Therefore, all our project activities, scientific and public outreach, we have done so far, have shown us the importance of this work, especially now when the local community became more aware of our work, what gives a hope that the conservation measures of cetaceans and the entire marine ecosystem will be stronger in the future.

#### **6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?**

During this project, we have promoted our activities and shared our results through social media such as websites, Facebook pages and Instagram accounts, as well as during the presentations which we held in schools, conferences and Marine Biology

Camp. Additionally, the results of the project will be shared with the Environment Protection Agency of Montenegro, and it will be published in the scientific journals.

### **7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?**

- Due to changes over the past years and decline we noticed in 2019, research on marine mammals must continue. Besides, marine mammal species are long – lived animals, therefore the continuation of this research is crucial, especially on the south Adriatic which is still understudied due to data deficient on many marine mammal species.
- To officially establish an action plan.
- To increase the collaboration with Institutions and NGOs in Montenegro and adjacent countries, because only with mutual collaboration we can gain more information about these very important marine top predators which will lead to better conservation measures in the future.

### **8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?**

The Rufford Foundation logo was used in all materials produced in relation to this project.

The Rufford Foundation was promoted to the wider community and received publicity during this project by being mentioned on the social media, during the outreach project activities, presentations and interviews among local communities and in front of researchers of Mediterranean and the entire Europe.

### **9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.**

**M.Sc. Natasa Nikpaljevic** – a project leader

**Dr. Aylin Akkaya** – external consultant of the project, responsible for volunteer training and data analysis

**Selina Brouwer** – the research associate involved in the field and public outreach activities

**Thalia de Haas** - the research associate involved in the field and public outreach activities

**Dejan Besovic**, director of NGO Our action which is a youth activist NGO formed in 2013 and active in environmental clean ups and education of youth. We have signed a cooperation agreement in 2020 with DMAD and have done education for youth.



**Vuk Koljensic** – manager of NGO “Our Action” who worked as a volunteer in the field of communication and social media

In addition, many volunteers from abroad contributed to the project activities.

#### **10. Any other comments?**

We are very thankful to The Rufford Foundation for supporting our third project and for helping us to continue with collecting critical data about dolphin species in Montenegro, as well as to share our knowledge to the local community and researchers along the Mediterranean and the entire Europe, what will help to the competent institutions of Montenegro to implement better conservation measures for the species which play a key role in marine ecosystem.

