

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Ibrahem Ben Amer
Project Title	The Tunisian Dolphin Project (TDP), 2022-2023 season of implementation
Application ID	36629-2
Date of this Report	16/02/2024

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
Fieldwork in the new site of Tunisian part of the Strait of Sicily (Gulf of Hammamet) – SITE A			YES	Nine field trips were conducted in this area with a total effort of 1,086 km (60+ hours). 41 dolphin sightings were made in the gulf area with individual counts varying from 1 – 6. A total of 16 well-marked individuals were identified and catalogued.
Fieldwork in the northern part of Tunisia. – SITE B			YES	Six field trips were conducted in the area cataloguing four new-marked individuals and several (12) recaptures of previously catalogued dolphins.
Training workshop (October 2022).			YES	2-day workshop for ATVS members on Cetaceans Research Methods.

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

- a)** Established a baseline/core catalogue for the bottlenose dolphin population present in the Gulf of Hamammet and have some preliminary data on behaviour, pod distribution and population dynamics. This is yet another step toward establishing a national catalogue for the species by covering another important area of Tunisia.
- b)** Update the existing catalogue for northern Tunisia (which holds data since 2015) and investigate whether there is any interaction or movements between the northern and the southern dolphin population(s).
- c)** Conduct training workshop in both theoretical and practical aspect of a cetacean survey to expand the TDP team and ensure the continuation of the programme with new blood in the future.

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

In general, the project has run with little difficulties. Here are the main issues encountered:

- There were some admin-related delays in the banking process until the funds reached ATVS's bank account. Through the continues communication and follow-up of ATVS Finance team, the funds were followed until they reached the account.
- Due to the increased prices of fuel and services (boat renting and transport to the working site), the original budget submitted in the application was short to finish the targeted 16 field trips (six in Site A and 10 in Site B). and the remaining budget was not enough to finish the final trip in Site B. Therefore, the fieldtrip was cancelled, and the remaining budget was used to buy binoculars for the TDP team (after seeking the permission of the Rufford Foundation in July 2023).
- There were some delays to acquire the permits to conduct the survey in Site A, but it was mitigated in time and the survey continued and completed the quota of fieldtrips dedicated to the site.
- The weather during 2022 -2023 behaved differently than expected and some trips were pushed until November 2023 where suitable weather occurred (which is unusual in this part of the Mediterranean).

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

In both Sites of the survey, boats were rented from the local fishers who were approached in various occasions to discuss the impact of dolphins on their fisheries and raise their awareness about the importance of these species to the marine ecosystem. This was the same with the authorities in the ports of Site A in which a presentation was given to them about the projects, their aims and scope to get the permits.

Finally, in Site A, casual meetings were held with the fishers in which the catalogue was shown and asked the fishers to name certain individuals following the names of their boats, title of their family or the name of their children as an "adopt and animal" approach to increase awareness and apply a measure of conservation to the species in the site. The same approach will be applied in Site B in the next stage

of the project when we have more information and data about the structure of the population there.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, we already applied and were accepted in the ACCOBAMS's Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCE) to expand our activities to yet another area of Tunisia (Gulf of Gabes – Site C). In this season (2024), we will survey the new area and conduct complementary surveys in the Site B. also, we are conducting more training workshops for local NGOS, and will be conducting a public awareness activity with Schools in Site C.

Once this campaign is finished, we will start looking for a fund to fill the remaining gaps and finally publish the National Catalogue of bottlenose dolphins in Tunisia with a population estimate, hotspot identification, etc.).

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

The TDP team has presented the TDP campaign in the Sixth Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries (CSMC6) which took place in Monastir, Tunisia, from 13-15 November 2023 (Abstract no.2 in the book of Abstracts. Presentation is attached with this report). The project was selected as a success story that should be adopted and implemented in other parts of the south Mediterranean region.

We are also co-authoring a Mediterranean-wide paper (Nebuloni *et. al.*, 2024: Ecology of the bottlenose dolphin in the Mediterranean Sea: are there two ecotypes?) which will be published by the end of this year along 2 other papers which are published at the same time.

Finally, TDP is a partner in data-sharing initiatives such as the INTERCET and will submit the data of distribution and catalogues in its next call for data and partnership. We are already a partner in the initiative but only submitted our first patch of data from 2015 – 2016 campaign in northern Tunisia (Financed by ACCOBAMS).

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

Plan campaigns to cover any remaining spatial gaps along the Tunisian coastline and start planning a national-wide analyses that includes publishing the National Catalogue of bottlenose dolphins in Tunisia, model a population estimate based on mark-recapture models, identify hot spots for distribution, corridors and anthropogenic threat and conduct a public awareness campaign targeting different stakeholders (Schools, fishers, decision-makers...etc.). this later step will be done in organisation with relevant organisations such as SPA/RAC, ACCOBAMS and WWF-NA.

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 logo of the Rufford logo was used in the presentation given in the CSMC, and it will be accredited in the upcoming publications (*please refer to the attached presentation*).

The Foundation was also accredited in social media posts stating that The Rufford Foundation supported the TDP work (example)

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

- a). Ibrahem Ben Amer, Lead Researcher and Funder of TDP.
- b). Mehdi Aissi, Scientific Coordinator and Co-Founder of TDP.
- c). Wael Ben Aba, President of the partner NGO ATVS.
- d). Syrine Moslah, Coordinator and Financial Officer at ATVS.

10. Any other comments?