

2016 SMALL GRANT IN AID OF RESEARCH – ANNUAL SUMMARY REPORT

STUDY ON THE THREE CETACEAN SPECIES STRANDED ALONG THE NORTHERN BULGARIAN BLACK SEA COAST

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SUMMARY REPORT

The study was conducted by examining stranded cetaceans found on the sea shore during a directly targeted search. After preliminary selection six transects were chosen on the northern Bulgarian Black Sea coast from Varna to Durankulak with a total length of 35 km. Observations were made through covering transects on monthly expeditions. The whole coast was observed, including beach length and width. Reported were seasonal dynamics of mortality of cetaceans in the autumn-winter period. During this study, a total of 32 dead cetaceans were found representing the three species inhabiting the Black Sea - the harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena relicta*), the short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis ponticus*) and the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*). Full or partial morphometric measurements were taken depending on the degree of decomposition. Data collection was in compliance with the standard form of the Mediterranean Data Base of Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES). The species of the stranded cetaceans was determined. The results show a prevalence of strandings of *Phocoena phocoena* (53%), followed by a considerably smaller percentage of strandings of *Tursiops truncatus* (12%) and the lowest percentage of *Delphinus delphis* (8%). In 27% of the cases the species of cetaceans found was not identified due to their advanced degree of decomposition.

An analysis of territorial distribution was executed. The geographical distribution of stranded cetaceans was established and an area with the highest frequency was registered - Shabla - Krapets.

Gender was determined only in specimens with low degree of decomposition. Photographs of each specimen were taken and GPS coordinates were recorded. The reported 32 dead cetaceans had a different degree of decomposition. The condition

of the marine mammals was determined by using a five point classification scale. Most common was decomposition of cetaceans in the fifth stage - mummified animal parts/a skeleton and its parts. In such cases, the dimensions of individual bones were registered.

The results of this study will be published next year in Ann. De L`Universite de Sofia "St. Kl. Ohridski".

I am therefore grateful to the Society for Marine Mammalogy for supporting the effort to study the three cetacean species in the Black Sea.