

Progress Report of "Combining Research with Education for Cetacean Conservation in Fethiye-Göcek SEPA Turkey"

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Project Purpose:

The project carries on two mutually inclusive stages: scientific research and activities for public awareness. Therefore the purposes of the project is to collect baseline data on cetacean distribution, abundance, initiate the first photo-ID catalogue, and identify important habitats and major threats within the Special Environmental Protected Area Fethiye-Göcek as well as to raise public awareness through ensuring the active involvement of fishermen, boat crews and children.



Figure 1. Sunrise in Fethiye-Göcek SEPA

Work completed:

We have completed three scientific boat surveys and two surveys for children of Fethiye-Göcek. The first two scientific surveys followed the pre-determined transect lines, while the last survey followed a different transect which covers the depth between Fethiye-Göcek and Rhodes.

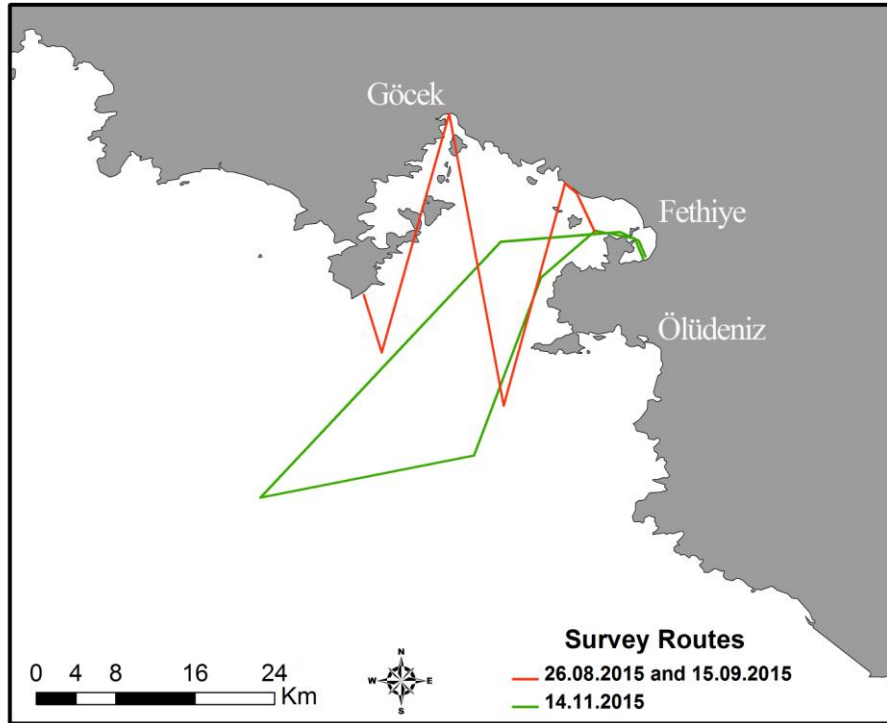


Figure 2. Survey routes

First boat survey took place on the 26th of August, 2015. A day before the survey, our team of 3 volunteers and 3 project team head to Fethiye to introduce our project to the fishermen cooperative and tour boat crews as well as to distribute questionnaires to the stakeholders. We have managed to talk with 15 fishermen from three different trawlers and the head of the fishermen cooperative. To summarise our talk:

- Most of the fishermen had a really strong negative opinion on nature conservation.
- Majority of the fishermen blame the dolphins for the depletion of fish stocks in the area.
- They didn't want to fill the questionnaires as they don't want the area to be protected anymore
- We invited the fishermen and their kids to our research vessel for developing a better relationship and to change their attitude towards nature
- We have rescheduled a meeting with the head of the cooperative as he was busy for the day and left fliers for him and the fishermen to read

The scientific survey on the 26th of August, took around 9 hours starting from 06:00. We invited two tour boat crew on board. Even though we spotted a flock of shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*) and a juvenile green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), no cetaceans have been spotted. An adult loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) was also sighted on the port between the fishing boats. The fishermen named the turtle and were frequently feeding the turtle.



Figure 3. Loggerhead turtle in the Fethiye Port.

Second tour took place on the 14th and 15th of September 2015. First day we have organised a dolphin watch tour for 15 kids selected from the villages of Fethiye. The kids were informed about the marine life of Fethiye and the importance of nature protection. T-shirts, fliers and handbooks with information on dolphins were dispersed to the kids and they are trained on how to use binoculars and dolphin behaviour. Questionnaires were also realised to the kids and saved in our database. Second day we have carried out our

scientific study for around 8 hours starting from 06:00 in the morning. Even though flock of shearwaters and an adult loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), no cetaceans have been spotted. However it was noted that there was a military exercise in the similar area with us.



Figure 4. Our Research Boat

Last tour was organised on the 14th and 15th of November, 2015 for over 15 hours in total. On 14th, an unidentified species of juvenile sea turtle, a juvenile swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) and 5 different tuna groups were spotted during the survey. Additionally, two individuals of adult pelicans were recorded as resting on the seaside. However cetaceans weren't sighted during the tour. After the tour, an interview with the local TV in Fethiye (KanalF) have been released and launched in the main news bulletin the next day. On the second day, a dolphin watch tour for selected 15 kids from different villages was organized. In this tour, kids were again informed about the importance of sea-life conservation and marine mammals. T-shirts, fliers and handbooks with information on dolphins were dispersed to the kids. We also provided the cameras for children and they made short footages of marine life.



Figure 5. Children that participated to our dolphin watch activity with the t-shirts that DMAD provided.

Future work:

- Our scientific studies and public awareness activities will carry on in the area for whole year round and will be following two different transects as it is shown in Figure 1.
- We have developed a mutual cooperation with Association for Supporting Contemporary Life, Bodrum and Municipality of Bodrum. The permissions are already taken for involving orphan children in our dolphin watch tour for the next months and we are preparing handbooks for the kids.
- We are writing up a new project to deploy hydrophone from our research vessel for increasing our detection rate.
- Photo-ID website for public is progressing and will be launched this month (photoid.dmad.org.tr).

Problems that aroused:

- While small scale fishermen are willing to take part in our project, big scale fishery, specifically trawlers, are not willing to collaborate with our project and its

activities. However we will keep visiting them in the port to develop a better relationship.

- We haven't encountered any cetacean species during our surveys however we got two different calls about a dolphin sighting; on the first week of September from fisherman and another call from our own captain on the first week of November. Previous studies recorded cetacean presence in the area for spring therefore it is feasible to think that there can be a season area usage which can only be clarified with a year round survey.

Overall Assessment of the Project:

- Cetaceans couldn't recorded by the DMAD team until now. There is a high possibility of seasonal area usage. Moreover to be more accurate on cetacean detection, acoustic detection should also be carried out with visual surveys.
- Important species as in loggerhead and green turtle, listed as Endangered; a juvenile sword fish, which has a depleting stock in Mediterranean Sea; *yelkouan* shearwater, listed as Vulnerable, tuna groups, have been recorded throughout the surveys.
- We have developed a good relationship with tour boat crews and small scale fishermen of Fethiye. We have introduced our project and our organisation to these stakeholders and received positive feedbacks and improvements on their attitude on cetaceans. They have reported that "whenever they go out to the sea, their eyes are searching for dolphins".
- Another strong relationship developed with an important organisation of Turkey (Association for Supporting Contemporary Life) whose aim is to reach contemporary society via contemporary education for contemporary people and to carry Turkey above the contemporary civilization level. They are more than happy to join our project activities and present the results not only in Fethiye but also in Bodrum.