

Project Update July 2023

The Tunisian Dolphin Project (TDP) is a research initiative established to monitor and assess the status of the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) population in Tunisia. The overall objective of the programme is to create and maintain a long-term monitoring programme that utilise the mark-recapture (photo-identification) as a monitoring protocol in collaboration with national parties in Tunisia. Indeed, and since its creation in 2014, the project has expanded its scope from the relatively small Bizerte Lake in 2014 (37.198 °N, 9.850 °E) to cover the entire northern Tunisian Coast in 2016 - 2019 (partially funded by the Rufford Foundation's first grant). In each campaign, the project has signed a working agreement with a local NGO to assist in organising logistics, capacity building and public awareness activities. During this campaign season (2021 – 2023), and with funding from the Rufford Foundation's second grant, The Tunisian Dolphin Project has joined forces with the Tunisian NGO Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage ([ATVS](#)), to expand the programme to the southern gulf of Hmammet (36.182 °N, 10.576 °E). The gulf is a well-known fishing ground for several commercial species and is also of touristic importance to Tunisia. The dolphins seem to favour this area apparently for its apparent high prey availability which is mostly enhanced by the presence of aquaculture cages and the Marine Protected Area of the [Kuriat Islands](#) (35.799 °N, 11.034 °E).

TDP has conducted six trips in this area during 2022 - 2023 with a total effort of 763 km (46+ hours). More than 26 dolphin sightings were made in the gulf area with individual counts varying from one to six dolphins in each sighting. A total of 12 well-marked individuals were identified and catalogued but with little recapture which (along with the produced discovery curve) indicates that the survey has managed to be covered only a small proportion of the population in that area. It is also noticed that dolphins encounter rate was higher on the southern part (where the aquaculture cages and the MPA are located) than the northern part of the gulf. Along with the fieldtrips in the novel site of Gulf of Hmammet, the project has also continued its monitoring in northern Tunisia (The gulf of Bizerte, 37.294 °N, 9.934 °E) and conducted six trips in that area cataloguing four new-marked individuals and 11 recaptures. There was also a 2-day training workshop for ATVS members on cetacean research methods which was implemented in October 2022. The project will continue its activities until October 2023 to conduct more fieldtrips, collect more data and contribute more to the knowledge of this species in Tunisia and the south Mediterranean.





