

The Mediterranean Marine Mammals Pelagos Sanctuary



Fin Whale

The Pelagos Sanctuary: an area of care and protection

History

Whales and dolphins are protected by Italian, Monegasque and French legislation respectively since 1980, 1993 and 1995. It is forbidden to destroy and capture them. On November 25th 1999 in Rome, France, Italy and the Principality of Monaco supported by other countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, signed an international Agreement to create a Mediterranean Marine Mammals Sanctuary, subsequently named Pelagos Sanctuary. After ratifications, this Agreement came into force on February 21st 2002. It strengthens the measures implemented for the protection of cetaceans and their habitats in the Mediterranean. The Sanctuary is on the Barcelona Convention SPAMI (Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance) list and it is the only International High Seas Marine Protected Area, dedicated to the protection of marine mammals.

Aims

Covering an area of 87,500 km², the Sanctuary aims to protect marine mammals and their habitat from all interferences: pollution, noise, by-catch, accidental injuries, disturbance, collisions, etc. Management measures adopted by France, Italy and the Principality of Monaco are implemented in collaboration with national Authorities and stakeholders: Government services, local Authorities, transportation, fishing and tourism professionals, associations and the scientific community.

The reason for the Sanctuary

All species of Mediterranean cetaceans regularly frequent the Sanctuary. Fin whales are mainly concentrated in the Pelagos Sanctuary, especially from May to October, attracted by the abundance of plankton. Currents and underwater topography

of the Sanctuary are the cause of a phenomenon of rising nutrients (upwelling) that ensures high biological productivity, favourable to the development of an abundant and diverse wildlife. However, the Sanctuary is subject to the effects of extensive coastal urbanization, pollution and multiple nuisance sources. This area is also known to intense maritime traffic (freight and passengers, military and pleasure) and commercial fisheries heavily exploit biological resources. Issues related to these activities and their consequences, both for the environment and for cetaceans, led three bordering countries to unite their efforts. For proper implementation of the Agreement, all those who freely use this area are expected to contribute to its protection

Design: Decidréab - Point Trait



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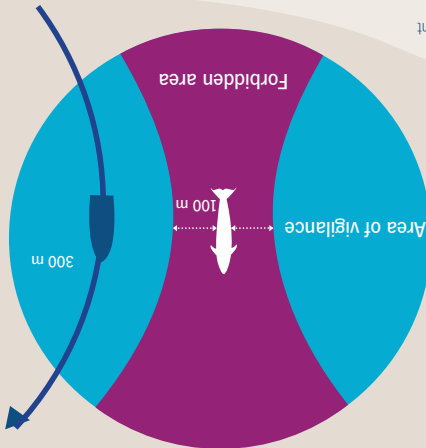
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- The distance to the animals and the approach zones
- Avoid whale-watching within the 5-miles coastal strip, since the cetaceans there are already greatly disturbed by human activity.
- Position the boat parallel to the animals
- Limit the boat speed to 5 knots. The speed must be constant and comply with the speed of the slowest animal.
- Avoid sudden change of speed and/or direction.
- Only one boat should be in the vigilance zone
- at a time and should not stay longer than 30 minutes (15 minutes if other boats are waiting).



- ### Respect:
- The cetaceans' tranquility
 - Immediately cease observing if the animals seem disturbed, agitated or stressed.
 - Be even more careful, and limit your distance of approach if you notice the presence of new-born animals.
 - Do not attempt to touch cetaceans, swim or plunge to their proximity.

In Italy, motorboats and jet-ski races are banned in territorial waters within the Pelagos Sanctuary, under Article 5 of Italian Law No. 391 of October 11th 2001. In France, since July 1st 2011, a ministerial decree can punish intentional harassment to marine mammals in waters under French jurisdiction.

Charter of partnership with riparian municipalities of the Pelagos Sanctuary

Littoral Municipalities of the Pelagos Sanctuary can express their willingness to participate and contribute, through their actions and according to their means, to the operational implementation of all necessary measures for the conservation of marine mammals in the Pelagos Sanctuary. To join, the city council should vote a resolution in favour of the Pelagos Charter.

Code of conduct for observing marine mammals

Observing cetaceans can be a source of disturbance for them if done without sufficient care.



Main species in the Sanctuary



Striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*)

Length: 2.2 m - Weight: 120 kg - Life expectancy: 40 years. It is the most abundant species in the Sanctuary. Their abundance estimate in the Sanctuary is 19,600 in winter and 39,000 in summer. It usually lives beyond the continental slope in groups of 10-15 individuals. During the breeding season, these groups can reach several hundred individuals. It is common throughout the year around the Sanctuary. The diet of the striped dolphin is opportunistic and mixed. It is composed of different species of fish, cephalopods and crustaceans.



Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

Length: 3.5 m - Weight: 300 kg - Life expectancy: 50 years. In the Sanctuary, their number is estimated to be approximately 1,000 individuals. Small groups of 4 to 8 individuals are often observed. Encountered from the coast to the continental slope (200 m depth). A predator showing great adaptability, it feeds mainly on fish (mullet, sea bream) but also cephalopods (squid, octopus) and crustaceans.



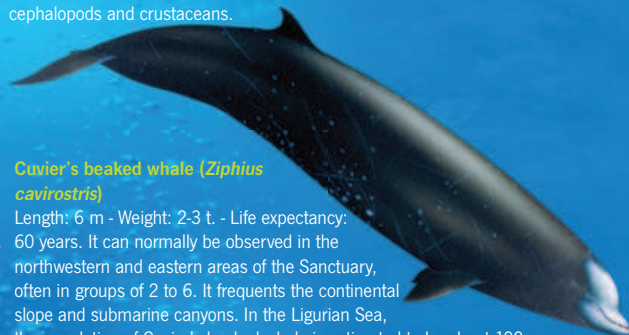
Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*)

Length: 2.30 m - Weight: 130 kg - Life expectancy: 30 years. Encountered between the continental shelf and the continental slope. It forms groups of several dozens of individuals. Nowadays, it is occasionally observed in the Sanctuary. It feeds primarily on schooling fish.



Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*)

Length: 4 m - Weight: 400 kg - Life expectancy: 50 years. It is characterized by a striped livery which tends to become white with age. It is regularly observed throughout the year to the west of the Sanctuary. It is encountered from the continental slope to the open sea. It lives in groups of 10 to 15 individuals. In the Mediterranean, it feeds exclusively on squid.

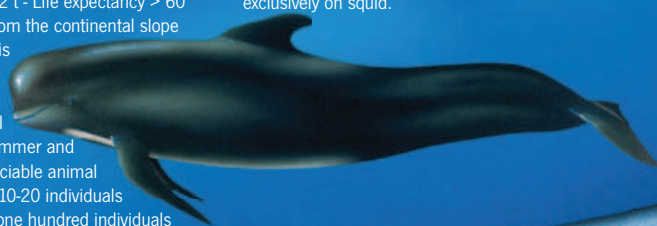


Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*)

Length: 6 m - Weight: 2-3 t - Life expectancy: 60 years. It can normally be observed in the northwestern and eastern areas of the Sanctuary, often in groups of 2 to 6. It frequents the continental slope and submarine canyons. In the Ligurian Sea, the population of Cuvier's beaked whale is estimated to be about 100 individuals. It plunges to over 1,000 m for more than an hour to feed on squid; it is therefore difficult to study.

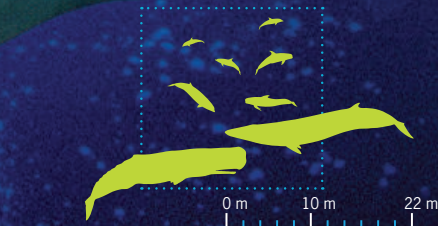
Long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*)

Length: 6 m - Weight: 2 t - Life expectancy > 60 years. Encountered from the continental slope to the pelagic zone. It is observed in the open sea, between the Ligurian and Provençal areas, especially in summer and autumn. It is a very sociable animal that lives in groups of 10-20 individuals on average and up to one hundred individuals during the breeding period. In the Méditerranée, it feeds exclusively on squid.



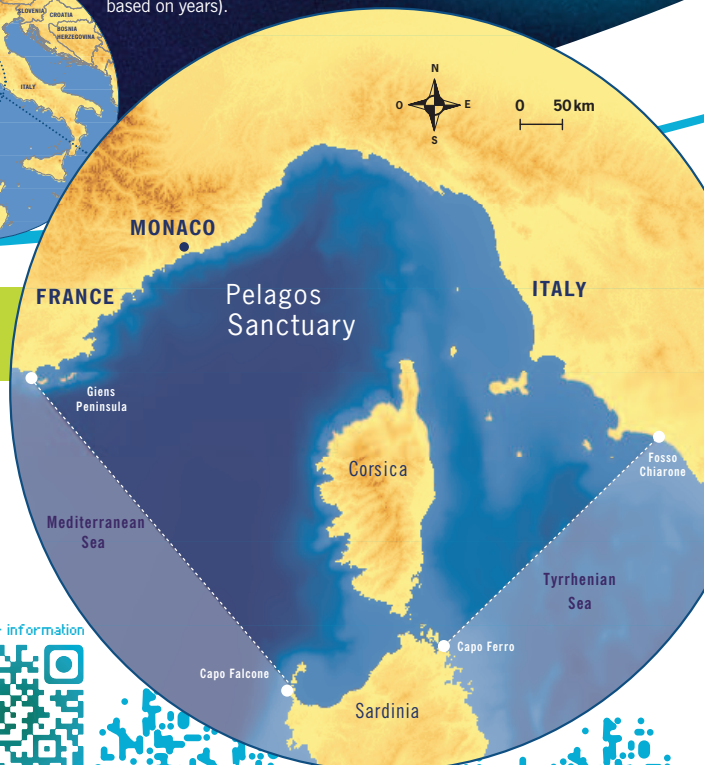
Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

Length: 18 m - Weight: 40 t - Life expectancy: 80 years. It is regularly observed throughout the Sanctuary, from the continental slope to the open sea, alone or in groups of 10 individuals maximum. It plunges over 1,000 m for about 1 hour to feed on large squids.



Fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)

Length: 22 m - Weight: 70 t - Life expectancy: 80 years. This is the only baleen whale regularly present in the Mediterranean. Fin whales frequent the area between the continental slope and the pelagic zone, in groups of 2 to 3 individuals or alone. Fin whales can be seen in areas northwest of the Sanctuary from spring to late summer when krill is abundant. Research indicates a seasonal variation in abundance between winter and summer as well as inter-annual variability (for the summer, estimates range between 150 and 1,600 individuals based on years).



Area: 87,500 sq.km
Coastline: 2,022 km
Number of bordering towns: 242

Since the monk seal is no longer observed, **cetaceans are the only marine mammals of the Pelagos Sanctuary**. Among them, **eight species** are commonly seen.

Cetaceans have to surface to breathe. **As human beings**, they nurse their young after several months of gestation in the womb of the female.

The order of Cetacean is divided into **two main sub-types** :

- **The baleens whale** (fin whale mainly for the Mediterranean) feed by filtering water through their baleen. They feed on small planktonic crustaceans (krill).
- **The toothed whales** (sperm whale, delphinidae etc.) have teeth, feed on fish and cephalopods (cuttlefish, octopus and squid). They live in groups, often with complex social structures.

For more information

