



VELLA

Assessing Natura 2000 sites in the Central Mediterranean for Cetacean Conservation



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INTRODUCTION

Natura 2000 sites are meant to contribute to the safeguard and survival of various marine species, including cetaceans.

The Interreg Italia-Malta SEA MARVEL project has focused its attention on the presence of dolphins and whales in different conservation areas in the central Mediterranean region including AMP Capo Milazzo (Sicily), AMP Isole Ciclopi (Sicily), AMP Isole Pelagie (Sicily), RNO Oasi del Simeto (Sicily), Marine Zone around Gozo (Malta) and Marine Zone close to Ghar Lapsi and Filfa (Malta), refer to Figure 1.

METHODS

The marine Natura 2000 sites are being studied through dedicated scientific researchers of the Universities of Catania and Malta since 2021. The CBRG-UM are using dedicated marine and aerial surveys around the Maltese Islands (Vella, 1998). The Di3A-UniCt are using dedicated marine surveys, observers onboard fishing boats and opportunity platforms in routes used by ferries. The latter include the SEA MARVEL project selected routes between: 1) Catania and Malta, and 2) Porto Empedocle and Lampedusa.

Fishing zones within and around the Natura 2000 sites are also being considered through the involvement of fishermen as stakeholders.

RESULTS

Different cetacean species have already been recorded (Table 1) including: Fin whales, Risso's dolphins, Bottlenose dolphins, Striped dolphins and Common dolphins. The latter needing special attention for their endangered status in the Mediterranean (Vella et al., 2021). Likewise, Risso's dolphins, Fin and Sperm whales. All needing sustained research efforts in the region (Mannocci et al., 2018).

The different species and respective activities observed allow for an updated understanding of the seasonal distributions and conservation requirements for these species in the Natura 2000 sites and connecting areas.

Integrating with various environmental parameters including: bathymetry, distance from shore, diverse additional species recorded, sea surface temperatures and anthropogenic activities aids to provide detailed research results for a comprehensive status assessment and useful Natura 2000 site management guidelines.

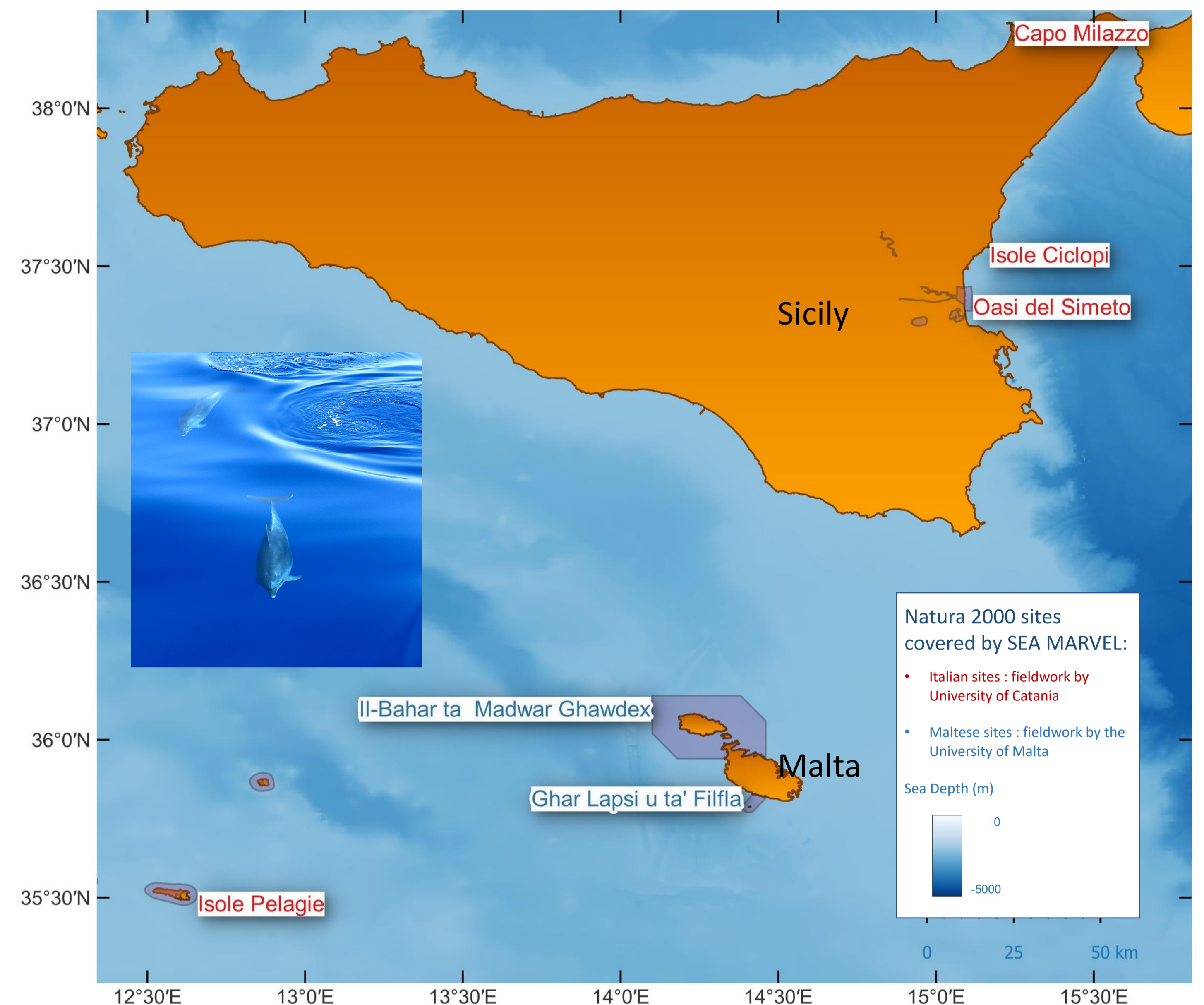


Figure 1: Map with Natura 2000 sites covered by the SEA MARVEL project & Bottlenose dolphins photo taken in Maltese Natura 2000 site [photo:A.Vella]

CONCLUSION

The SEA MARVEL project targets the provision of guidelines and recommendations to relevant authorities taking care of the management of the marine Natura 2000 sites under consideration.

References:

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Acknowledgements:

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Table 1: Preliminary Results of Species Encountered in and between Natura 2000 sites

Research Effort by Survey Type (km)		Species encountered					
		<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	
		Bottlenose	Common	Striped	Risso's	Fin whale	Unclassified
Aerial (Dedicated Surveys)							
Malta							
3500		Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marine (Dedicated Surveys)							
Malta	Catania						
1332	1120	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Marine (Opportunistic Routes)							
Catania-Malta	Empedocle-Lampedusa						
10250	2250	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

