



Interreg
Italia-Malta



sea marvel

Save, Enhance, Admire Marine Versatile Life



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SEA MARVEL Project reflects real need for ambitious environmental projects targeting our seas

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[Photo 1: Endangered Common Dolphins in Maltese Waters, by Prof. Adriana Vella]

Dates dedicated to the Earth (5 June), its Seas and Oceans (8 June), its biodiversity (22 May), and the increasing endangered species (21 May) are a few but important calendar events. These commemorated dates remind us of the many treasures we are quickly losing if we continue with careless lifestyles.

In fact, the Interreg Italia-Malta **SEA MARVEL project** held its first meeting with its eleven Associated Partners on 21 May (National Endangered Species Day) in anticipation of 22 May (Biodiversity Day). The support given by the diverse Associated Partners reflects the real need for such ambitious environmental projects targeting our seas.



[Photo 2: Marine Turtle gliding underwater, by Prof. Adriana Vella]

This **Interreg Italia-Malta SEA MARVEL project** targets a wave of change toward these important requirements focusing on a region that is a hot spot for vessel traffic, fisheries and pollution. This project is being led by the University of Catania (*UNICT*), through the involvement of Prof Iuri Peri and his multidisciplinary research team, in collaboration with the University of Malta (UM), through [Prof. Adriana Vella](#) and her experienced research team.

SEA MARVEL aims to raise awareness of the risks and mitigate the effects of plastic pollution, declining populations of marine species, alien species invasion and climate change effects in order to support the protection of marine Natura 2000 sites, hand in hand with youths, fishermen, sea users, and Ministries/Authorities for the Environment, Education and Sustainable development.



[Photo 3: Cory's shearwater ready for liftoff, as it walks on water, Prof. Adriana Vella]

The United Nation's Second World Ocean Assessment 2021 confirmed that many of the benefits that oceans provide are being undermined by pollution, including plastics big and small; climate change - warming and acidifying our seas, as they rise to flood our shores; overfishing, impoverishing marine biodiversity and small artisanal fishing communities.

So it is not surprising to note that this year's theme for World Oceans Day is "*The Ocean: Life and Livelihoods*", emphasising the immense value oceans and seas have for sustainable development and our natural and cultural heritage.

In our endeavour to make a change, conservation areas are legally set-up with the promise of effective management and enforcement. But too often the plans are too slow in being implemented. In the meantime, species populations continue to decline, pollution continues to increase in various ways, illegal fishing goes ignored and conservation monitoring and implementation left last on the to do list.



[Photo 4: Bottlenose Dolphin in Maltese Waters, by Prof. Adriana Vella]

As international and EU obligations urge the Mediterranean states to reverse the increasing negative trends, it is very encouraging to see funds devoted to conservation research, management and education involving stakeholders, toward achieving these obligations as fast as possible.

Dedicated **SEA MARVEL** field work around Malta and Sicily, shall scientifically assess the current status of vulnerable and indicator species, such as cetaceans and turtles. It will also target timely interventions to identify and reduce alien species and plastics in marine Natura 2000 sites in line with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive's Good Environmental Status. Innovative instruments shall also be used to train youths and managers in efficient marine biodiversity monitoring and plastic litter elimination.

Through **SEA MARVEL**, challenges that stimulate active hands-on participation of the younger generation and coastal communities towards the development of sustainable management plans shall be set-up. The "**Sentinel of the Sea**" service, as part of the **SEA MARVEL** project, is another good environmental activity that sees the involvement of fishermen and travellers at sea addressing in an integrated way the reduction of the risks related to marine litter, unknown biodiversity resilience and increasing human pressures on our seas.



[Photo 5: Endangered Common Dolphins in Maltese Waters, by Prof. Adriana Vella]

Prof. Iuri Peri stated that “Sea Marvel represents the ambitious challenge of reconciling the environmental dimension of sustainability with the social and economic ones, so that marine biodiversity is protected in the Italian-Maltese cross-border area, and this through integrated research, training and dissemination activities that will involve a wide network of stakeholders”.

Prof. Adriana Vella stated that “We marvel at our wonderful seas and we all aspire to hand on such wonder to our children. SEA MARVEL is here to give a strong helping hand in achieving this by increasing useful knowledge, environmentally responsible citizenship, collaboration with stakeholders to facilitate swifter progress in regional valorisation and protection of our seas – the blue cradle of life on Earth”.

SEA MARVEL Expert research team members for UNICT include: Prof. Iuri Peri, Prof. Giuseppina Carrà, Prof. Gabriella Vindigni, Dr Vera Foti, Dr Clara Monaco

SEA MARVEL Expert research team members from UM include: Prof. Adriana Vella, Dr Joseph G. Vella, Dr Noel Vella