GOING PUBLIC: ONLINE MAP OF SEA TURTLE RESCUE POINTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Judith Ullmann [1]*, Michael Stachowitsch [2], Lobna Ben Nakhla [3] and Liza Boura [4]

[1] Department of Arctic and Marine Biology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway - judith.ullmann@uit.no
[2] Department of Limnology & Bio-Oceanography, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
[3] UNEP-MAP Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA), Tunis Cedex, Tunisia
[4] MEDASSET – Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles, Athens, Greece

Abstract

The Map of Sea Turtle Rescue Points in the Mediterranean is a joint initiative of the authors aiming to bridge information, communication, and collaboration gaps in sea turtle conservation. Open access to contact details of all known rescue facilities will be provided to the public and professionals alike. Using solely freeware and capitalizing on a published study that offers the necessary contextual framework, we are developing an inexpensive online tool to increase awareness and visibility of facilities and to assist in management, research, and decision-making on a Mediterranean scale. The timeline for finalization of the alpha version of this work-in-progress is summer 2016.

Keywords: Turtles, Mapping, Conservation, Mediterranean Sea

The Map of Sea Turtle Rescue Points in the Mediterranean is a joint initiative of MEDASSET (lead partner), RAC/SPA, and the authors of [1], based on their Mediterranean-wide compilation of sea turtle rescue facilities. A key issue in conservation biology is recognizing and bridging the gap between scientific results and specific action [1], often under monetary limitations. Our current work-in-progress aims to answer the call [1, 2, 3] for a common online database to compile rescue facility-relevant data, facilitate communication and networking among professionals, and increase public awareness and involvement (Fig. 1). Since publication of the paper, feedback has been received on new facilities and will be incorporated in the online map. The database and map will use the contextual framework proposed by the paper.
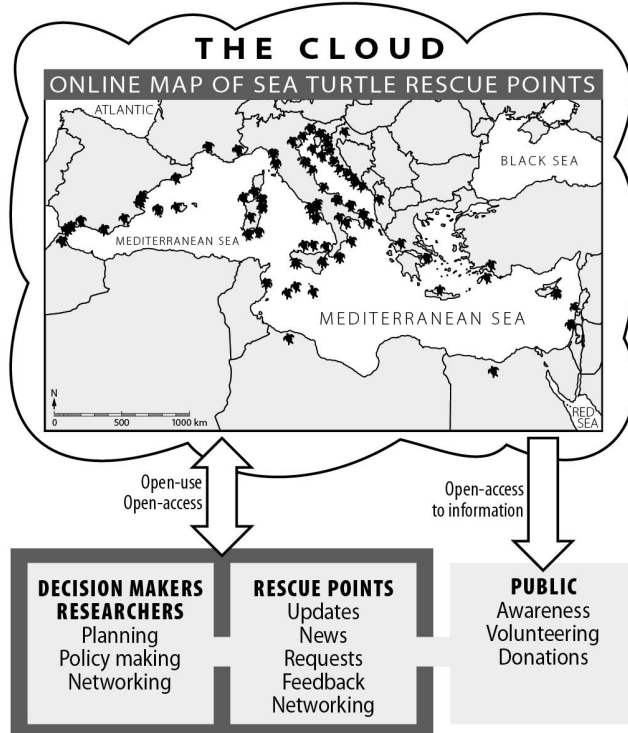

Fig. 1. Outline of the Online Map project to facilitate access to information, thereby increasing public awareness and assisting in management, research, and decision-making on a Mediterranean scale.

Constraints and objectives were to develop a readily accessible information and communication platform with the least cost-intensive (but functional) technical tools, allowing for a minimum start budget, low-profile software skills for maintenance, and therefore increased longevity. Two online maps will be set up in the cloud for a) the public and b) decision makers, planners, and researchers. The principle of both is open access to basic information about all rescue facilities in the Mediterranean, assembled in one spot, presented in "living" maps instead of static texts and tables. The map aiming to provide public information and intended for "awareness" and a broad target group, will be made available on Google Maps by MEDASSET. The one intended for planning and decision making will be made available in MedGIS – Mediterranean Geographical Information System on biodiversity – managed by RAC/SPA. The new layer is expected to be used in RAC/SPA and UNEP/MAP planning and decision making processes, such as the Ecosystem Approach Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (EcAp). Both maps will be based on data collated in a unique spreadsheet in a shared online environment, allowing for direct update of contact details by users with basic spreadsheet skills. Any internet user can embed Google Maps into their website thus multiplying the initiative's aims and impact. The setup ensures that maintenance will also be simple and inexpensive: MEDASSET will engage its interns and volunteers for a scheduled once-a-year spreadsheet update and map maintenance. MEDASSET will use web analytics to tangibly assess the public map's impact and ensure continual improvement. Facilities will be contacted to provide updated details within a set deadline. The map will state when the respective information was last updated. MEDASSET or RAC/SPA, depending on the contact, will make the effort to ensure contact details are up to date or confirm cessation of activities of the respective contact. RAC/SPA Focal Points government authority representatives will be contacted for validation of information as necessary. Facilities will be able to update information or deliver news, feedback, and requests directly online on an unscheduled basis. A notification setting will be created to inform facilities about changes made. The timeline for finalization of the alpha version in English is June 2016. Once implemented, next objectives will be expanding the contact list, maintaining the maps online, reviewing the working process on a biannual basis, and developing a multi-lingual beta version. The project is self-financed by the partners using available human resources and freeware.

References

1 - Ullmann J. and Stachowitsch M., 2015. A critical review of the Mediterranean sea turtle rescue network: a web looking for a weaver. *Nature Conservation*, 10: 45-69.
2 - Panagopoulou A. and Rees A.F., 2009. Networking among Rescue Centres in the Mediterranean. *In*: Demetropoulos P. and Turkozan O. (Eds) Proceedings of the Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, Kemer, Antalya (Turkey), May 2005. Barcelona Convention, Bern Convention, Bonn Convention (CMS), pp 144–147.
3 - Kasparek M., 2003. Proposals for Setting-Up a Clearing-House Mechanism to Monitor Marine Turtle Populations in the Mediterranean. *In*: Margaritoulis D. and Demetropoulos A. (Eds) Proceedings of the First Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, Rome (Italy), October 2001. Barcelona Convention, Bern Convention, Bonn Convention (CMS), Nicosia, Cyprus, pp 151–155.