

MEPA calls on volunteers to help gather data on the presence of loggerhead turtles and bottlenose dolphins in Maltese waters

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the presence of the bottlenose dolphin (*id-denfil ta' geddumu qasir*) and the loggerhead turtle (*il-fekruna l-komuni*) within Maltese territorial waters and the type of habitat which is essential for their survival, MEPA is calling on volunteers to support it in the collection of data as part of the LIFE+ MIGRATE Project.

LIFE+ MIGRATE aims to gain a better idea of the type of populations of the two species as well as of their positioning within Malta's surrounding waters. As Project Manager Carmen Mifsud explains, "this study will be exploring the presence of these species within 25 nautical miles of Malta's territorial waters and will be building on the current available, yet limited, data."

"We will be studying 'hot spots' frequented by these species and the presence of certain characteristics which draw these species to these areas," adds Ms Mifsud. The project is also looking to identify the potential of feeding areas or important migratory routes, in order for these areas to be given the protection needed to safeguard the livelihood of the species.

To strengthen the type of data that is being collected, MEPA is calling on volunteers to collect information related to the behaviour of these species. Volunteers will receive a half day training session on how to collect such data and will be awarded with a certificate of recognition for the support offered once the project is complete.

The data collected will also take into account the presence of other species within Malta's territorial waters and, as the Project Manager explains "this project will not only help us gather more information about the two precious species, but will also allow us to achieve a better understanding of the country's biodiversity." Gaining better knowledge of the country's biodiversity moves Malta a step closer towards achieving its environmental 2020 targets, which, among other measures, calls for the proper identification of the country's biodiversity.

The project, which commenced on 1st October and will be concluded in April 2014 is being co-financed by the European Commission's LIFE Fund and will gain additional financial support from the Ministry for Tourism, Culture and the Environment and Bank of Valletta. The Spanish company KAI Marine Services is also financially supporting the project as well as providing its expertise gained on a similar project in Spain.

Anyone interested in volunteering and helping in the project's data collection, may send an email to life.migrate@mepa.org.mt. Applicants will be subject to an interview.