

The First International Conference on Marine Mammals and the Second National Conference on Cetaceans

The First International Conference on Marine Mammals and the Second National Conference on Cetaceans took place at Riccione, Italy between August 30th and September 2nd 1989.

Predictably, Adriatic Seaworld, and in particular Leandro Stanzani and Giuseppe Caniglia, in collaboration with other organizations including Fondazione Cetacea, Greenpeace Italia and the Centro Studi Cetacei Milano, had arranged for superb weather (at least for the International bit), a fine venue and charming hospitality. The theme of the conference was the protection of marine mammals in the Mediterranean, and it attracted about 100 participants, from countries as far away as USA and USSR.

The first day consisted of papers that comprehensively covered all the main sectors of what was neatly termed 'the deteriorating ecosystem'. Peter Reijnders reviewed the varieties of marine pollutions and some of their pathogenic mechanisms, particularly in relation to pinnipeds, describing for example how PCB compounds are able to exert effects on reproduction through hormone interference, on liver function and on susceptibility to disease by reducing levels of oestradiol and B cells and increasing T cell numbers. He emphasised the complex nature of synergism among multiple pollutants.

Sheila Anderson spoke on the impact of fisheries upon marine mammals worldwide. Although she said the incidental losses of Common, Spotted and Spinner dolphins in tuna fishing were now down to around 40 000 per year, an American participant claimed the figure was still closer to 100 000 plus. Drift net fishing is the big bogey at the present time. It was killing 40 000 Dall porpoises and numerous Northern fur seals in the North Pacific; then the numbers dropped, only to rise again recently as the Japanese and Taiwanese have expanded their drift net fleets. Among many interesting points, Sheila mentioned that 25% of Monk seal deaths in Greek waters are caused by entanglement in nets, that 50% of all fish farms (marine, of course) have seals entangled in their nets at some time each year, and that there is no evidence that krill harvesting in Antarctica is yet affecting marine mammal or bird life.

She claimed the biggest problem faced by marine mammals around the globe is debris from the fishing industry, with otarids worse affected by entangle-

ment than phocids and the reduction in the fur seal population perhaps being mainly due to this hazard.

In an excellent review of the work at Pieterburen, Lies Wedder described the changing pattern of rescue/rehabilitation activities over the years at this centre which is now putting through baby seals in numbers which represent about 20% of the total Dutch seal population.

Also on the first day Adrianos Casinos reviewed the 173 strandings of cetaceans on the Spanish Mediterranean coast during the past 12 years; the commonest species to be stranded, particularly in Spring, is *Stenella coeruleoalba*.

Jacques Maigret dealt with the cetaceans of the French, and Luigi Cagnolaro with those of the Italian waters. The latter again mentioned the significant threat to cetaceans posed by drift net fishing in this area.

The second day concentrated on marine mammal/fisheries interaction and research strategies in the Mediterranean. Antonio Di Natale considered the intensive gill-netting activity of sword-fish catchers, particularly in the Tyrrhenian Sea where both small cetaceans and migrating sperm whales are seriously under threat.

Giuseppe Notarbartolo, Randall Wells, Bernd Wursig and others dealt with specific areas of cetacean research including telemetry, acoustic census possibilities, DNA analyses and sighting schemes.

The third day was devoted to the Second National Cetacean Conference and, appropriately, was in Italian. Giuseppe Notarbartolo chaired a round table discussion that considered the first three years of work and the future prospects for the Centro Studi Cetacei.

Copies of conference abstracts and other literature can be obtained from Adriatic Sea World.

One of the many locals who dropped in to sample the conference was the man who owns most of the clam-hoovering boats operating out of Riccione. With these delectable molluscs also being over-fished, the Italian clam-boats are now moving on to Turkey. Sea life in general is under appalling pressure in the Mediterranean and Adriatic, so let us hope the 'Clam King' too gained something from this important conference; otherwise the ultimate disaster will befall us and we will be denied our 'spaghetti vongole' when we meet at the EAAM Conference at Riccione in 1991!

D. C. TAYLOR