

***Monitoring of the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)
in the Natura 2000 area HR5000032-The waters of western Istria***

*This is a summary of the monitoring of common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) during 2024-2025.*

The aims included providing information on the abundance of bottlenose dolphins in the area of western Istria, the spatial distribution of sightings, behaviour and age classes of the observed groups, potential interactions with human activities, and possible presence of other marine mammals or sea turtles.

The best mark-recapture model applied to photo-identification data suggested that between 188 and 306 animals used this area during the study period, with a mean estimate of 240 animals. While most groups were relatively small (<10), some were large (>90), consistent with the general fluid nature of bottlenose dolphin social structure. Calves are present in the majority of encountered groups, showing that the area represents a habitat for all age classes.

We recorded very few interactions with human activities. Bottlenose dolphins frequently interact with fishing activities, particularly trawling. We recorded no targeted dolphin-watching activities during the surveys. Still, commercial dolphin-watching activities appear to be relatively widespread in northwestern Istria, especially in the summer months, where up to nine vessels surround a single group of dolphins.

*One sightings of a loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) was recorded in June 2024.*

Dr.Tilen Genov and co., MORIGENOS-Slovenian Marine Mammal Society, March 2025