

## UNUSUAL SIGHTING OF A STRIPED DOLPHIN (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) IN THE KVARNERIĆ, NORTHERN ADRIATIC SEA

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An adult striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, was encountered east of the island of Lošinj on 6 May 1996, and observed from a small inflatable boat for 5 hours. The only cetacean species that has been consistently observed in the Northern Adriatic Sea in the last decades is the bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*.

Occasional reports of striped dolphins in the Central and Northern Adriatic Sea may simply reflect the occurrence of stray individuals, but the fact that such observations have only occurred recently might be indicative of a progressive extension of the striped dolphin's range, as has been reported for other Mediterranean areas.

**Key words:** Striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea, ecology, behaviour.

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Odrasli prugasti dupin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, opažen je istočno od otoka Lošinja 6. svibnja 1996. godine i promatran tijekom pet sati iz malog gumenog čamca. Jedina vrsta reda Cetacea (kitovi) koja je redovito viđana u Sjevernom Jadranu posljednjih desetljeća, bio je dobri dupin, *Tursiops truncatus*.

Povremena opažanja prugastog dupina u Srednjem i Sjevernom Jadranu možda su samo pojava zalutalih jedinki, ali činjenica da su se ta opažanja zbilja nedavno možda su indikacija progresivnog širenja areala prugastog dupina, a zabilježena su i u drugim dijelovima Sredozemlja.

**Ključne riječi:** Prugasti dupin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, Sredozemno more, Jadransko more, ekologija, ponašanje.

## INTRODUCTION

An adult striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba* (Fig. 1), was encountered east of the island of Lošinj (Fig. 2) on 6 May 1996. A description of the sighting is provided here for the following reasons: 1) this appears to be the first well-documented observation of a striped dolphin in this area; 2) it relates to a single individual of a gregarious species that is commonly found in aggregations numbering a few hundred, and sometimes thousands of individuals (LEATHERWOOD & REEVES, 1983; KLINOWSKA, 1991), although Mediterranean groups are usually smaller (NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA *et al.*, 1993); 3) the observation took place in a relatively shallow marine area, near to the coast, whilst the species is typically found in deep offshore waters, where it may feed at depths extending well below 200 m (KLINOWSKA, 1991, NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA *et al.*, 1993, NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA & DEMMA, 1994); 4) the specimen, actively feeding and playfully interacting with the research boat, appeared to be in good health based on its behaviour and external appearance. The dolphin was observed from a small inflatable boat (Novamarine 4.60 m) powered by a Honda 50 HP four stroke engine, for a total of almost 5 hours, from 14:17 till 19:20. Position data were recorded at 3-min intervals by means of a global positioning system (GPS Magellan Nav 1000 plus). Additional observations were made from a vantage point on the coast, by means of a tripod-mounted 31x magnification monocular. The striped dolphin was alone,



Fig. 1. *Stenella coeruleoalba* (Photo by Caterina M. Fortuna)

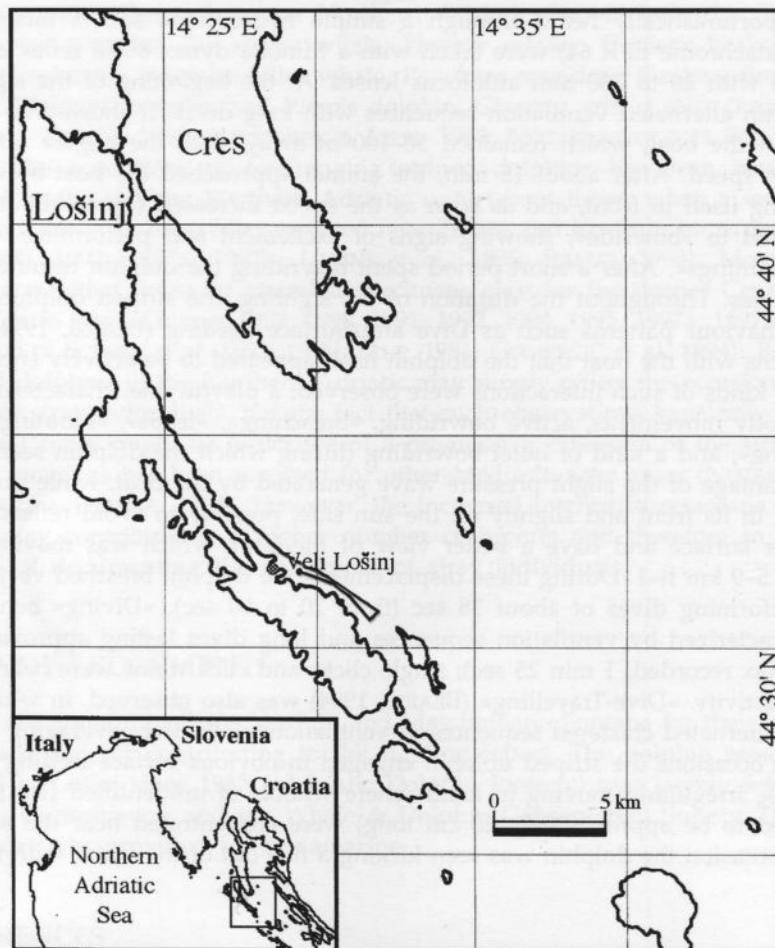


Fig. 2. Unusual sighting of striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) in the Kvarnerić, Northern Adriatic Sea.

with no other dolphins sighted in the area on that day (the sea was flat and visibility was good). When first observed, the dolphin was moving south along the coast, over a muddy bottom about 65 m deep. After about 3 hours it turned around northwards at a slightly higher speed, following approximately the same path, and was left to the north of the initial position of the sighting. The behaviour of the dolphin was recorded by using a 3-min behavioural sampling technique adopted for bottlenose dolphins (BEARZI, 1994). *Ad libitum* notes were also taken throughout the sighting, together with data including respiration intervals, speed and pattern of movement, and behavioural events (terminology based on WEAVER (1987); here reported in quotes). The sounds produced by the dolphin

species, rarely observed in the Northern Adriatic Sea, include the fin whale, *Balaenoptera physalus*, the sperm whale, *Physeter catodon*, Cuvier's beaked whale, *Ziphius cavirostris*, the false killer whale, *Pseudorca crassidens*, the long-finned pilot whale, *Globicephala melas*, and Risso's dolphin, *Grampus griseus* (NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA & BEARZI, 1992; KRYŠTUFEK & LIPEJ, 1993; NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA *et al.*, 1994). The occurrence of free-ranging striped dolphins has been never documented in the shallow Northern Adriatic until recent times, when a few strandings and sightings have been reported near Trieste and Venice (Centro Studi Cetacei, 1990, 1992, 1997a, 1997b; LAPINI *et al.*, 1995; RALLO, 1996). More records relating to either living or stranded specimens exist for the deeper Central Adriatic (Centro Studi Cetacei, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA *et al.* 1993; DI NATALE, 1981; GOMERČIĆ *et al.* 1994). Reports of striped dolphins in the Northern Adriatic may simply reflect the occasional occurrence of stray individuals, but the fact that such observations have only occurred in recent times might be indicative of a progressive extension of the striped dolphin's range, as has been reported for other Mediterranean areas (NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA & DEMMA, 1994). However, the increased interest in cetaceans in recent years may contribute to a higher number of reports and therefore to a higher chance of documenting the occurrence of stray individuals.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Summary

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An adult striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, was encountered east of the island of Lošinj on 6 May 1996, and observed from a small inflatable boat for 5 hours. A description of the sighting is provided for the following reasons: 1) this appears to be the first well-documented observation of a striped dolphin in this area; 2) it relates to a single individual of a gregarious species that is commonly found in aggregations numbering a few hundred, and sometimes thousands of individuals, although Mediterranean groups are usually smaller; 3) the observation took place in a relatively shallow marine area, near to the coast, whilst the species is typically found in deep offshore waters; 4) the specimen, actively feeding and playfully interacting with the research boat, appeared to be in good health, according to its behaviour and external appearance. The only cetacean species that has been consistently observed in the Northern Adriatic Sea in the last decades is the bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*.

Occasional reports of striped dolphins in the Central and Northern Adriatic Sea may simply reflect the occurrence of stray individuals, but the fact that such observations have only occurred recently might be indicative of a progressive extension of the striped dolphin's range, as has been reported for other Mediterranean areas. However, the increased interest in cetaceans in recent years may contribute to a higher number of reports and therefore to a higher chance of documenting the occurrence of stray individuals.

## Sazetak

### Neuobičajeno opažanje prugastog dupina (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) u Kvarneriću, Sjeverni Jadran

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Odrasli prugasti dupin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, opažen je istočno od otoka Lošinja 6. svibnja 1996. godine i promatran tijekom pet sati iz malog gumenog čamca. Opis opažanja daje se zbog sljedećih razloga: 1) čini se da je to prvo dobro dokumentirano opažanje prugastog dupina u ovom području; 2) odnosi se na jednu jedinku inače druževne vrste koja se obično nalazi u skupinama od nekoliko stotina, ponekad i tisuća jedinki, iako su u Sredozemlju skupine obično manje; 3) opažanje je vršeno u relativno plitkom moru, blizu obale, dok se vrsta obično može naći u dubokim otvorenim vodama; 4) prema izgledu i ponašanju činilo se da je jedinka, koja se aktivno hranila i zaigrano plivala oko istraživačkog čamca,

bila zdrava. Jedina vrsta reda Cetacea (kitovi) koja je redovito opažana u Sjevernom Jadranu posljednjih desetljeća, bio je dobri dupin, *Tursiops truncatus*.

Povremena opažanja prugastog dupina u Srednjem i Sjevernom Jadranu možda su samo pojave zalutalih jedinki, ali činjenica da su se ta opažanja zbila nedavno možda su indikacija progresivnog širenja areala prugastog dupina, a zabilježena su i u drugim dijelovima Sredozemlja. Povećano zanimanje za kitove posljednjih godina moglo bi rezultirati većim brojem opažanja i dokumentiranja pojave zalutalih jedinki.