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PROTECTING ADRIATIC BIODIVERSITY IN KOTOR: THE CONGRESS ADRIBIOPRO 2019

An international conference on the protection of the biodiversity of the Adriatic Sea was held from 7th to 10th April 2019 in the town of Kotor, a small coastal pearl listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The conference was organized by the Institute of Marine Biology of the University of Montenegro. It was the final event of the project "Marine Biodiversity Conservation Center 'Boka Aquarium' – MonteAqua", aiming to gather all relevant national and regional stakeholders, as well as to secure closer regional cooperation in the Adriatic region. During the four days filled with various activities, participants from 16 countries delivered 92 presentations covering 9 different topics: marine biodiversity conservation, conservation of coastal and marine areas, preventing marine pollution, rare and endangered species in the Adriatic Sea, invasive and alien marine species, roles of aquaria, sustainable use of marine resources, marine biotechnology, and freshwater biodiversity conservation.

The event opened with an exhibition by the talented underwater photographers Ivana Orlović Kranjc and Janez Kranjc titled "Hidden Beauty of the Sea". The photographs portraying the rich and colourful underwater world of the Adriatic Sea were a lovely introduction into two days of interesting presentations and panel discussions.

In her introductory speech, Professor Đurdica Perović, Vice Rector of the University of Montenegro, stated that the results of the conference would be used in shaping future marine science priorities and policies in Montenegro and other Adriatic countries. With the main focus of the conference being biodiversity and its protection, a lot of emphasis was put on some current issues that pester the global oceans, such as unsustainable use of resources, marine pollution and non-indigenous species, as well as certain local problems characteristic of the Adriatic Sea. On a more operational note, the participants pointed out some deficits, such as the lack of experts in taxonomy, especially in the younger generation, as well as the growing need for cooperation among Adriatic countries.

Many excellent contributions were presented, abstracts of which can be viewed at the website of the 'Aquarium Boka' Marine Biodiversity Conservation Center (<http://www.aquariumboka.ucg.ac.me/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/AdriBioPro2019-BookAbstracts-20190408.pdf>). Among eminent researchers, Academician Professor Dr. Gordan



Fig. 1: Panel discussion with esteemed marine biologists on the topic: Why Adriatic biodiversity matters (photo: Institute of marine biology Kotor).



Fig. 2: The participants of the first AdriBioPro conference (photo: Institute of marine biology Kotor).

Karaman, an expert in amphipod taxonomy, presented his lifelong study of these crustaceans, which yielded descriptions of several new species from the Bay of Kotor. A special focus was put on the issue of mass mortality of the Mediterranean endemic bivalve *Pinna nobilis* caused by a protozoan parasite. An international group of researchers presented their experience and lessons learned from this occurrence and the measures taken so far to counteract it. The word of the conference had reached as far as Lebanon; in fact, the marine scientists from this country presented an interesting study of the Lebanese population of the endangered, yet still heavily exploited common guitarfish.

Many interesting speeches were given, priorities and policies were discussed, but like in many similar occasions, even more valuable connections and collaborations were probably made during the array

of social activities. The conference dinner held on the Wednesday evening was one of them. We had a unique opportunity to see a glimpse of rich Montenegrin cultural heritage through the performance of local folklore dancers, while enjoying Montenegrin food and wine. In my opinion, the conference was a success and more such occasions would be appreciated in the Adriatic region in the future.

Ana Fortič

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