

Note:

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of RAC/SPA and UNEP concerning the legal status of any State, Territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of their frontiers or boundaries.

© 2013 United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)
Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat
B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis Cedex - Tunisia
E-mail: car-asp@rac-spa.org

The original version of this document was prepared for the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) by Atef OUERGHI

Introduction

The conservation of the elements that make up biodiversity depends on the availability of reliable, regularly updated information and data. Despite the efforts of the concerned international organisations and countries, important gaps persist as regards the knowledge needed for the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean. Moreover, major difficulties have still been remarked for the acquisition of information, especially due to the shortcomings in the system in which information on biodiversity is circulated.

This was clearly stated in 2003 in the context of SAP BIO (the Strategic Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine and Coastal Biodiversity in the Mediterranean), which concluded, on the basis of an analysis of the available sources of information, that the knowledge of Mediterranean biodiversity cannot be deemed sufficient for it is neither full nor systematic and there are obvious gaps at the level of both population/individual (genetic diversity) and species and habitats/communities. Thus the collection and circulation of information on biodiversity have been among the main priorities of SAP BIO.

In 2011, the same conclusion was drawn by an initial assessment carried out during the third phase of implementing the ecosystem approach process initiated in the Mediterranean in the context of the Barcelona Convention. The initial assessment indeed concluded that the non-availability of information constitutes a real handicap. But it remarked on a big disparity between countries, in that data is limited in some countries and more complete in others. Shortcomings in financial and human resources are the main causes of gaps in the availability of biodiversity-lined information.

It is, however, important to stress that an effort has been made to put standardized data-collection tools at the disposal of the countries of the region, and that databases and information systems are now available. What must be done in the future is to feed these databases and information systems to help them respond to the needs of users of information on marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean.

Main recent actions by RAC/SPA to facilitate the collection and exchange of information on marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean

Since the last Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs, RAC/SPA has worked on standardized data-collection tools and on setting up new databases in collaboration with partners in the region.

As regards standardized tools for collecting data on the constitutive elements of biodiversity, the countries have for several years had at their disposal the Standard Data Form for national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest (SDF). Today a computerized version of the SDF is available coupled with a GIS module (MedGIS). These tools are complementary and compatible with the tools developed as part of implementing the European Union's Habitats Directive. The Mediterranean countries can gain enormously by

using these tools to improve the availability of information on sites, habitats and species that are of conservation interest, and, in particular, improve the quality of their data.

As part of RAC/SPA's collaboration with the MedPAN association, a database on Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) was set up under a portal with a GIS element (MAPAMED) integrated. This answers the need to have a centre of resources that brings together and structures a great deal of information on Mediterranean MPAs. MAPAMED constitutes an advance on the former databases, particularly the databases on MPAs in the Mediterranean developed by MedPAN in 2008 and the database on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas that has been available at RAC/SPA since the early 1990s. Its main objective is to offer countries and governmental and non-governmental bodies a tool that will allow:

- the analysis and assessment of the state and trends of the Mediterranean network of MPAs
- access to and sharing of data on Mediterranean MPAs
- the identification of ecological and management issues on a supra-MPA scale.

RAC/SPA recently started another database that concerns non-native species. It fits into the context of implementing the Action Plan (Action Plan Concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea) and aims at enhancing monitoring and the circulation of information, particularly on invasive marine species in the Mediterranean. It is designed to be a tool for the exchange of information and could also serve as an early warning system on the appearance in the Mediterranean of high-risk species.

Suggestions for RAC/SPA actions on collecting and circulating information

With a view to facilitating the acquisition and exchange of data on marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean, it is recommended that RAC/SPA direct its action over the coming two-year period towards the following activities:

- Enhancing partnership with the actors in the region concerned by the collection and circulation of pertinent information for the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity
- Greater assistance to countries for the use of the SDF and to strengthen their capacity to map marine habitats
- Helping the countries in the field of reporting on biodiversity in the context of the Barcelona Convention and the SPA&BD Protocol
- Working to craft elements for integrated follow-up as part of implementing the ecosystem approach. This work should be done in close collaboration with the other components of the MAP, the countries' representatives and the concerned international organisations. Implementing integrated follow-up is part of the ecosystem approach. It will provide the necessary data for calculating the indicators and targets regarding the Ecological Objectives adopted by the Contracting Parties
- Further developing MedGIS and working in close collaboration with the Focal Points to feed data into it.

