CONTRIBUTION TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF RARE AND ENDANGERED HABITATS - MARINE CAVES (MONTENEGRO, SOUTH EAST ADRIATIC COAST)

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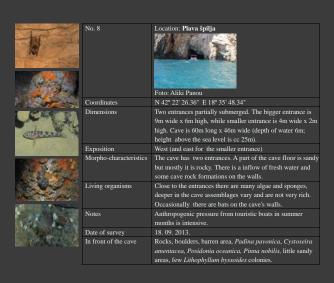
INTRODUCTION

Marine caves are an important and endangered habitat listed in Annex I of the EU Habitat Directive (1992). They are also protected by the Montenegrin law on nature protection (Sl. list, 2013). Over two-thirds of the territory of Montenegro belongs to the karst formation of the south-eastern Dinarides with various and specific rocky forms including numerous caves. Data on marine caves in Montenegro are very scarce and, at present, there is no Marine Caves' Register (although it is planned by law). For all above reasons we surveyed the marine caves in the northern coast of Montenegro in order to:

- (a) contribute to the knowledge of this important, but poorly studied habitat,(b) to create the basis for the urgently needed Cave Register and(c) to ensure a better management of this rare, endangered and protected habitat.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the surveyed area we registered 20 marine caves one of which had an underwater entrance. Only few marine caves had a relatively deep submerged area (up to 30m depth below the sea level), while most of them were only a few meters deep. In some caves there was a small pebble or sandy beach and in others cave rock formations were found. Some beaches inside the caves were registered as potential habitats for the endangered Mediterranean monk seal, Monachus monachus.



Besides the marine caves we also registered 24 holes less than 5m long, but still important as potential habitat for some rare or endangered species. In the surveyed area, the following 7 marine protected species (SI. list 2006) were registered inside or around the caves: Lithophyllum byssoides, Cystoseira amentacea, Posidonia oceanica, Cymodocea nodosa, Pinna nobilis, Cladocora caespitosa and Lithophaga lithophaga. Additionnally, 2 species of protected terrestrial plants were noted, namely Euphorbia dendroides and Limonium angustifolium, 5 species of protected birds, namely Ardeola ralloides, Alcedo athis, Phalacrocorax aristotelis, Acciptier gentilis and Corvus corax, and one protected bat species (Miniopterus schreibersii). Furthermore, in few locations, in front of the caves we registered nursery area for some key species (e.g. Epinephelus costae, Epinephelus marginatus).











Bibliography
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MATERIAL AND METHODS

We surveyed the area from cape Arza (peninsula of Luštica) down to cape Platamuni (peninsula of Donji Grbalj) (ca. 40km), in September 2013. Special attention was given to the area planed for the future MPA Platamuni (from cape Žukovac to cape Platamuni). For all registered caves/holes longer than 5m the following basic data were noted: location name, geographic coordinates, dimensions (in meters), exposition, morphological characteristics, date of survey, and typical living organisms in the cave and in front of it. During the postprocessing of the collected data all locations were mapped by Quantum GIS software (2013).











No. 40	Location: Krekavica cave	
	Foto: Aliki Panou	Foto: Dušan Varda
Coordinates	N 42° 17' 02.59" E 18° 45' 24.77"	
Dimensions	15m wide x 8m high x 15m long (depth of water 30m; height above the	
	sea level is 4m)	
Exposition	South	
Morpho-characteristics	The cave is widely open to the south and the walls inside the cave in the water are vertical down to 30m depth. On the bottom and in a small area in front of the entrance there is sand. On the west side of the cave there is a cubical boulder creating almost an underwater bridge. Further inside the cave there is no air gap. On the east side, a part of the vertical rock divides the space so that one can enter the cave also from the smaller hole. Behind this part on the east side it is completely dark.	
Living organisms	High biodiversity. The most abundant organisms are various species of sponges but also many other polychaetes, bryozoans, crustaceans and others.	
Notes	This is the location with the richest cave biodiversity observed so far.	
Date of survey	21. 09. 2013.	
In front of the cave	Above the cave there are high vertical cliffs where some endemic plants	
	were observed. For example, Euphorbia dendroides is very abundant.	

CONCLUSIONS

Our data on marine caves in Montenegro will be used for the urgently needed creation of a Caves' Register and will substantially contribute to implement more efficient protection measures marine environment in general















