

Location



Introduction

The Republic of Croatia is a Balkan country on the Adriatic coast which is bordered by Slovenia to the northwest, Hungary to the northeast, Serbia to the east, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the south, and a small southern border with Montenegro. It has over 1,200 islands and islets, with a total coastline, including those islands and islets, at a length of 5,835km. The coastline can be divided into the northern Istra Peninsula and the Dalmatian coast. It is considered to have one of the more varied coastlines in the Mediterranean and is a popular coastal tourist destination.

The climate along the coastlines is that of a Mediterranean one, with mild and sometimes winters and dry hot summers.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Mediterranean Sea LME

Habitats

- Rocky shores can be found throughout Croatia and its' islands and islets, quite typical of a Mediterranean coastline.
- Maquis are a habitat characterised by shrubs and small trees that can be found on the Adriatic coast. They are one of the main habitats in the protected landscape of Donji Kamenjak in the southernmost tip of the Istra Peninsula. They can also be found on islands and along the Dalmatian Coast.
- Seagrasses can be found in the coastal waters mostly around the islands off the Dalmatian coast.
- Coastal wetlands and lagoons can be found in certain locations in Croatia, such as in the Neretva Delta and in Brijuni National Park, often as part of protected areas. More information can be found in the biodiversity hotspots section.
- Sandy beaches can be found around the Croatian coast, although rocky shores are much more common. The sandy beaches are popular tourist destinations.

Biodiversity Hotspots

→ National Parks

Lastovo Archipelago is a national park, Natura 2000 Site, SPA, IBA and KBA off the southeast coast of Croatia. It covers 44 islands, with cliffs and reefs being a predominant coastal type. It is an important stopover point for migratory birds. It is also an important breeding site for Yelkouan shearwater, Scopoli's Shearwaters (*Calonectris diomedea*) and Audouin's Gull (*Larus audouinii*).

→ RAMSAR Sites

Vransko Lake, also an IBA and Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), is one of only two coastal RAMSAR sites in Croatia, found on the Dalmatian coast and separate from the Adriatic Sea by a narrow, permeable karst ridge. The site is a nesting, wintering and resting area for waterbirds such as common pochard, spotted crake (*Porzana porzana*) and Baillon's crake (*Zapornia pusilla*). It is also a habitat for the critically endangered European eel.

Neretva River Delta has reedbeds, meadows, lagoons and sandbanks and is in the far south of the coastline of Croatia. It is an important migratory stopover point for many terns, gulls and waders such as the Eurasian spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and the black-winged

stilt (*Himantopus Himantopus*).

→ IBAs

Western Istrian Maritime Zone, also including Natura 2000 sites, covers the majority of the western Istrian peninsula on the Adriatic Sea which is mostly islets and coastal cliffs. It is an important wintering area for seabirds.

Kvarner Islands are between the Istrian coast and the Dalmatian coast that comprises a large grouping of islands both large and small. The cliffs are important nesting areas for Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and an important wintering area for sandwich terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*).

NW Dalmatia and Pag Island is off the Dalmatian coast and is the only area with mud and sandflats in the Croatian coast. It is an important stop off point for waders during migration. It is the most important wintering area for divers, sea ducks and grebes, and the most important breeding site for Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) in Croatia.

Kornati National Park and Telascica Nature Park, also Natura 2000 sites, is a grouping of many islands, islets, bays and high cliffs which are important breeding areas for raptors such as the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), shags such as the European shag (*Gulosus aristotelis*) and swifts.

Offshore Islands, also a KBA, Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI, is an IBA designation that covers the island of Vis with surrounding islets, as well as islands Bisevo, Sv. Andrija, Brusnik, Jabuka and Palagruza in the Adriatic Sea. The area is an important breeding area for the endangered Yelkouan shearwater and has almost the entire national breeding population of Cory's shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*).

Hvar Channel, also a KBA, is an important area where the endangered Yelkouan shearwater breeds in a shallow part of the Adriatic Sea between the islands of Hvar and Brač. The channel is also a relatively busy area for marine traffic and ferries.

Korčula Channel, also a KBA and Natura 2000 site, is on the other side of Hvar island to the site above, and covers the shallow marine area between Hvar and Korčula. It is an important breeding area for the endangered Yelkouan shearwater. It is also a breeding area for Audouin's Gulls (*Larus audouinii*) which is near threatened globally and endangered in Croatia.

→ IMMAs

Northern Adriatic and Dalmatian Archipelago IMMA covers the whole Croatian coast and much of its waters. It is an IMMA due to the high numbers of common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) that breed in the waters and are present all year round.

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

→ At risk birds

Croatian waters and coastlines are an important area for birds in the Mediterranean and can be stopover points for migratory birds travelling on the Adriatic Flyway which can have over a million birds pass through it. It is a particularly important breeding area for the endangered yelkouan shearwater, but also for gulls and ducks.

→ At risk reptiles

The Loggerhead sea turtle is the most common marine reptile in the Adriatic Sea and in Croatian waters, although it does not normally nest in Croatian coastlines. Green turtles are rare visitors but can be in Croatian waters towards the south. They also do not nest in Croatia.

→ At risk mammals

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) are the most common species of dolphins in the Adriatic Sea of Croatia. Fin whales and sperm whales can occasionally pass through the waters, although considered relatively rare nowadays.

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

There have not been any major oil spills or oiled wildlife incidents in Croatia, but there can be smaller oil spills from ships or in ports.

In June 2018, Raska Bay, Istra Peninsula, was impacted by an oil spill when about 3,800 litres of fuel oil spilled into the sea during loading due to human error. The bay was closed for bathing and harvesting of mussels was banned as a result. The spill took about 10 days to clean up.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

- d CLC Convention 69
- CLC Protocol 76
- CLC Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 76
- FUND Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 2003
- LLMC Convention 76
- LLMC Protocol 96
- OPRC Convention 90
- HNS Convention 96
- HNS PROT 2010
- OPRC_HNS 2000
- BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS)
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution
- The Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

A National Oil Spill Contingency plan was last adopted in 2008 and has yet to be further updated. It is implemented if pollution exceeds 2000m³. If the pollution is less than this, each county should have their own oil spill contingency plan for those smaller spills. Each county has their on contingency plan except for Lika-Senj County.

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

'The Headquarters' is a body that gets set up during a spill which oversees the implementation of the plan in case of a spill. The Headquarters is appointment by the central government and can be representatives for the sea, environment, internal affairs, water management, or other ministries or relevant stakeholders. The Commander is a representative of the central state administrative body competent for the sea, and the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) always has a seat. The Headquarters coordinates activities at sea carried out by the MRCC who are the responsible party for operational tasks at sea. It also decides whether to activate international assistance through REMPEC or other means.

The County Operational Centre coordinates the overall response with the local counties and their contingency plans. It consists of representatives from counties and their administrative bodies who can be responsible for marine protection, harbour masters, expert institutions, etc. The COC and the Civil Protection can be involved in shoreline cleanup under the coordination of the COC, if requested by The Headquarters.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines on oiled wildlife response in the plan. However, the Adriatic Training and Research Centre (ATRAC) submitted some guidelines to include a chapter on wildlife in the update to the current plan. It is unclear if this will be done.

→ Response objectives and strategy

There are no response objectives for wildlife in the national oil spill contingency plan.

→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

There are no guidelines on euthanasia or rehabilitation.

→ Impact assessment

There is no formal structure for a wildlife impact assessment, although it could be considered under the general impact assessment which prioritises assessing protection and/or restoration of the marine environment and selecting the most appropriate measures for preventing and responding to marine pollution. The body responsible for this would be determined by the county contingency plans.

→ Notification and early response

There is no formal structure for a wildlife impact assessment, although it could be considered under the general impact assessment which prioritises assessing protection and/or restoration of the marine environment and selecting the most appropriate measures for preventing and responding to marine pollution. The body responsible for this would be determined by the county contingency plans.

→ Wildlife responders

Although there are no formal oiled wildlife response networks in Croatia, there are some organisations that rescue and rehabilitate animals. The Blue World Institute of Marine Research and Conservation is involved in the management of MPAs and has worked on dolphin and sea turtle conservation. Similarly, the other wildlife rescue centres (below) might provide responders although they are not trained for oiled wildlife. In 2013, the National Protection and Rescue Directorate organised a POSOW National Pilot Training, but there has been no further actions for oiled wildlife training or with those who were trained.

→ Cooperation between stakeholders

Croatia is a party to the Barcelona Convention (REMPEC) which covers the Mediterranean Sea. Croatia is also a part of the sub-Agreement in REMPEC for the Adriatic Sea with Italy and Slovenia for pollution prevention and response.

→ Permanent facilities

There are a number of wildlife rehabilitation centres operating in Croatia, although not all are relevant for oiled wildlife as they focus on conservation of vultures. Some are restricted to strictly protected species, while others accept a broader range of animals.

Regarding sea turtles, there is a rehabilitation centre in the Aquarium in Pula which could be considered a centre to rehabilitate oiled turtles. The Blue World Institute of Marine Research and Conservation also has a sea turtle rehab centre but capacity is unclear. The Institute also works on seabird conservation and rehabilitation, although it is unclear the capacity.

→ Current processes

There is an ongoing process to update the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan which has been ongoing for quite some time, but no sign of finalisation yet.

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Appendix 1

→ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

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Common pochard / (*Aythya ferina*) / VU / Migratory / non-breeding
Lesser white-fronted goose / (*Anser erythropus*) / VU / Migratory / non-breeding
Velvet scoter / (*Melanitta fusca*) / VU / Resident / non-breeding
Horned grebe / (*Podiceps auritus*) / VU / Migratory / non-breeding
Yelkouan shearwater / (*Puffinus yelkouan*) / VU / Resident / breeding
Grey plover / (*Pluvialis squatarola*) / VU / Migratory / non-breeding
Broad-billed sandpiper / (*Calidris ferruginea*) / VU / Migratory / Non-breeding
Curlew sandpiper / (*Calidris alba*) / VU / Migratory (Autumn) / Non-breeding
Audouin's gull / (*Larus audouinii*) / VU / Rare resident only in south / breeding (60 pairs)
Greater spotted eagle / (*Claudia clanga*) / VU / Migratory (winter) / non-breeding
Red-footed falcon / (*Falco vespertinus*) / VU / Migratory (spring/Autumn) / non-breeding
Aquatic warbler / (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) / VU / Migratory (spring/Autumn) / non-breeding

➔ **At risk reptiles**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Loggerhead Sea Turtle / *Caretta caretta* / VU / Resident all year / non-breeding
Green sea turtle / *Chelonia mydas* / EN / Visitor (mostly juveniles) / non-breeding

➔ **At risk mammals**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Fin whale / *Balaenoptera physalus* / VU (EN in Mediterranean) / Rare visitor / non-breeding
Sperm whale / *Physeter macrocephalus* / VU / Passage summer / non-breeding