

Project Update: October 2003

Since July, we started to accomplish the educational goals of our project. We offered two conferences and two free courses focussing on the ecology and conservation of local marine mammals at the University of Comodoro Rivadavia. The community response was overwhelming. All the media (television channels, radio stations and local newspapers) broadcasted these activities and interviewed Dr. Reyes on several occasions. Approximately 300 people attended the events, including many biology and tourism students, marine enthusiasts, Coast Guard officers, and primary, high school and university teachers. Moreover, several schools asked us to offer more lectures and to participate in meetings related to environmental issues.

We launched the formation of the stranding and sighting network, involving the Coast Guard, a Nautical operations company, the Comodoro Rivadavia Fisheries Council, the Coastal Reserve (Punta del Marques) wardens and many local students and private navigators. We designed and distributed among them an identification chart and a sighting report form and we have already received several sightings through this system.

The Provincial Government is very interested in our programme and is actively promoting all our activities. Besides, we were invited to participate in the Declaration of a new Marine Protected Area in the northern San Jorge Gulf, our study area, and in the design of its Management Plan, regarding the relevance of the information we are producing for this unique area.

The steps for the last phase of the project are to re-start the field work in October, continue with the conferences due to the high demand, and communicate some research results in the National Marine Science Congress.

We are deeply satisfied with the goals achieved so far and with the people interest and response. We really feel that through this programme we are filling a gap in that area, enhancing public participation and making people aware about the ocean conservation.