

Colchis IMMA

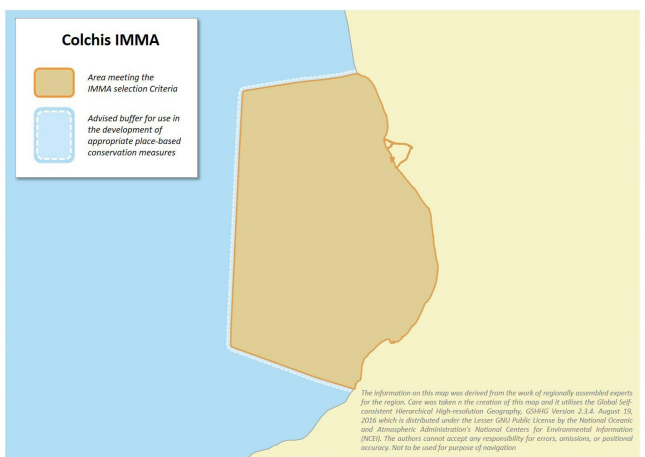
Description

The Colchis IMMA covers most of the coastal waters of Georgia known as Colchis (a geographic name of pre-Hellenistic Greco-Roman origin). It includes the waters between the Anaklia Cape and Sarpi. Habitats within the IMMA include open sea and circulation zones, river deltas or estuaries, coastal lagoons, and shallow water regions (including bays). Perhaps most significantly, the marine area is affected by 150 rivers from the Georgian area. Among these, the largest is the Rioni, which yields 406 m³/s of water and an average of 4.7 million tonnes of sediments annually.

The Caucasus mountain chain protects this area from north winds. The underlying bathymetry is characterised by gorges and deltas that are created by riverine outflow. The water temperature ranges from 9° C to 11° C in winter (southward), in spring around 13° C, in summer the average temperature rises to 25° C, and in autumn it is 21° C (Beruchashvili and Elizbarashvili, 2003).

The Colchis IMMA includes Kolkheti National Park, which was established to help protect and maintain the local wetland ecosystems. The Kolkheti lowland became the subject of international interest first in 1996, when Georgia joined the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat.

The coastal area between Cape Anaklia and Sarpi was recognised as having importance for Black Sea cetaceans, such as common dolphins and harbour porpoises, in ACCOBAMS Resolution 4.15 (2010). The Colchis IMMA also includes two EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas): Kolkheti Marine Area and Sarpi (Considered by the Convention of Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties).



Area Size

3,475 km²

Qualifying Species and Criteria

Black Sea harbour porpoise –

Phocoena phocoena relicta

Criteria A, B2, C1, C2

Black Sea common dolphin –

Delphinus delphis ponticus

Criteria A, B2, C1, C2

Black Sea bottlenose dolphin –

Tursiops truncatus ponticus

Criteria A, C1, C2

Marine Mammal Diversity

Phocoena phocoena relicta, *Delphinus delphis ponticus*, *Tursiops truncatus ponticus*

Summary

The Colchis IMMA is located in Georgian territorial waters and covers the waters between the Anaklia Cape and Sarpi. It encompasses open sea and circulation zones, estuaries, coastal lagoons, and shallow water bays. The IMMA is heavily influenced by the 150 rivers that discharge into it. Thousands of harbour porpoises and common dolphins use the area during the winter and spring, while hundreds of them use the area in summer. The mouths of the Enguri, Rioni, Khobistskhali, Supsa and Chorokhi rivers are the main feeding grounds for all three qualifying species within the IMMA.

Criterion A: Species or Population Vulnerability

Three threatened subspecies of small cetaceans (*Tursiops truncatus ponticus*, *Delphinus delphis ponticus* and *Phocoena phocoena relicta*) are found in the Colchis IMMA year-round. The Black Sea harbour porpoise and the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin are both listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, and the Black Sea common dolphin population is listed as Vulnerable (Gol'din et al., in press; Öztürk et al., in press; Tonay et al., in press).



Figure 1: A Black Sea common dolphin leaping out of the water. Photo courtesy of Mare Nostrum by Marian Paiu.

Criterion B: Distribution and Abundance Sub-criterion B2: Aggregations

The IMMA is a wintering ground for harbour porpoise (Öztürk et al., in press). Double-platform line transect visual surveys were conducted in this IMMA from 2014 until 2020. Approximately 1,200 (SE=310) animals were recorded in the beginning of autumn 2014, and this increased to around 18,000 (SE=1,329) porpoises present in these waters during the winter 2014.

In 2016, 16,715 (SE=4902) porpoises were recorded in winter. By comparison, approximately 9,500 (SE=5,574) porpoises were recorded in the area in spring 2016, and 3,200 (SE=825) in summer 2019 (Kopaliani et al., 2015; Kopaliani et al., 2017)

Similarly, the IMMA is an important aggregation area for common dolphins in winter. Approximately 15,000 (SE=2988) common dolphins were observed to use the IMMA during winter 2014, up to 8,000 (SE=5,234) animals during spring 2016, and approximately 3,700 (SE=1196) in summer 2019 (Kopaliani et al., 2015; Kopaliani et al., 2017).

Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities Sub-criterion C1: Reproductive Areas

Evidence that the IMMA is important for cetacean reproduction include observations of courtship behaviour of bottlenose and common dolphins in May and June (Kopaliani et al., 2015), records of all three Black Sea species associated with calves under 3 months of age, and records of stranded harbour porpoise within the IMMA in the late stages of gestation. It is therefore assumed that the area is used for mating and early stages of calf rearing (Kopaliani et al., 2017).

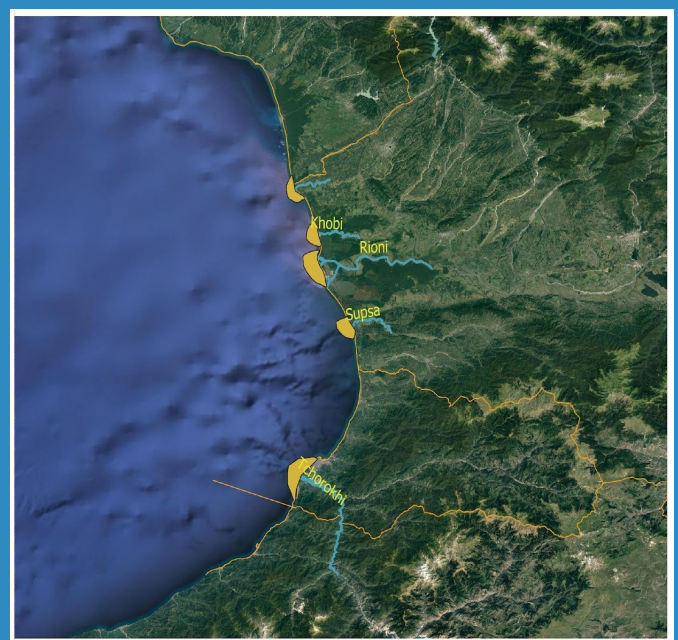


Figure 2: Well-known feeding areas (in yellow) for Black Sea cetaceans within the Colchis IMMA.

Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities

Sub-criterion C2: Feeding Areas

In winter and spring, large aggregations of anchovies (*Engraulis encrasicolus*) use the IMMA as a wintering and spawning area (Chashchin, 1996) and provide harbour porpoises, common dolphins and bottlenose dolphins with abundant food (Tonay et al., in press). The mouths of the Enguri, Rioni, Khobistskhali, Supsa and Chorokhi rivers are the main feeding grounds for all three species (Kopaliani et al., 2017).

Supporting Information

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