



OUTREACH – where to from here?

By **Róisín Nash**

The central principles surrounding the MarBEF Outreach planning over the last few years have been breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression. Through this long-term planning we strove to achieve progressive development of learning, using the Outreach web pages as our main dispersion tool, to ensure that all the main aspects of marine biodiversity received attention over the project's timeframe.

As you can imagine, trying to reach out to all ages from as young as four through to senior citizens has been an enormous task, and we have not finished yet! There will always be something new to learn as we find out more about the seas around us, but we hope that the legacy of MarBEF Outreach will be starting blocks to marine biodiversity education. We also hope that the use of the Outreach pages will increase over time and that in the near future marine biodiversity will be incorporated into the school curriculum throughout Europe.

MARINE BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION

Marine Biodiversity Wiki

MarBEF had the concept of developing a Marine Biodiversity Wiki which would link in with the Coastal Wiki developed by ENCORA, providing information on marine biodiversity. This educational tool allows information on marine biodiversity to be accessed and explained at the touch of a button.

Wiki software allows users to create, edit and link web pages easily. A wiki is essentially a database for creating, browsing and searching through information; one of the best known is Wikipedia. While many wikis are open to alteration by the general public without requiring them to register user accounts, the Marine Biodiversity Wiki will require user authentication to edit pages. Many edits by approved contributors, however, can be made in real-time and appear almost instantly online. This can facilitate abuse of the system.

The marine wiki is due to be launched at the

World Conference on Marine Biodiversity, so why not go online and check out our marine biodiversity wiki through the MarBEF website www.marbef.org.

Marine Education pages online

As part of a larger study on the science curricula around Europe, we took Ireland as a case study and examined the science curriculum, along with the tasks and objectives, to see how and if marine biodiversity can or could be introduced into the curriculum. Based on this and the wider study at large, we have developed a number of strands/modules within the Outreach education pages, namely: *marine biology*, *marine ecology* and *marine awareness*. These activities are divided into age categories which allow each strand to provide continuity and progression in marine biodiversity education where the students build on their prior knowledge from ages as young as 4 years through to 16 years of age. These strands contain a number of fun activities which teachers/home educators can introduce into the classroom. For the younger students, these pages will be available in different languages.

We have finished the basics of the primary Outreach pages and are now working on the educational pages for secondary school students. We have also developed some teachers' notes to complement these activities, which are all free to download at www.marbef.org/outreach.

SCIENTIFIC OUTREACH

While for many it appears on the surface that the MarBEF Outreach team has given only a small fraction of its time to scientific outreach, if you look at it from a different aspect you will see that, by educating those outside of the scientific community on all aspects of marine biodiversity, the programme has enabled a greater appreciation of the scientific results being produced by marine scientists. This understanding is what is needed if we are going to achieve our long-term goals such as halting biodiversity loss in the oceans and seas.

The MarBEF Outreach stand has appeared at a number of scientific conferences over the lifetime of the project. It is manned by MarBEF scientists who have been spreading the word to the scientific community of their work and achievements in the realm of marine science research. MarBEF scientists have produced many publications and given numerous presentations at meetings and conferences. The webmail run by VLIZ has become extremely popular as a way of keeping in touch with the scientific efforts of MarBEF throughout the lifetime of the project.

As I mentioned earlier – we haven't finished yet, so stay tuned to the Outreach pages for further updates.

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