Morgane Pommier

Our “getting to know you” series continues with Galway-Mayo IT’s PhD student, Morgane Pommier, who is leading on SeaMonitor’s cetacean research activities. Her work with the project involves using data collected from static acoustic receivers and glider deployment to model cetacean distribution and noise near the Malin to Islay Front.

Morgane graduated in 2019 from the International MSc in Marine and Biological Resources (IMBRSea). She conducted her thesis work in GMIT, using visual and acoustic monitoring approaches to explore the habitat use of bottlenose dolphins in Shannon Estuary SAC. Her main research interests include top predators ecology, conservation, underwater acoustics and habitat modelling.

When did you know you wanted to become a scientist? Were you interested in marine biology from a young age?

I was quite set on becoming a scientist from 11-12 years old and growing up on the coast, a marine oriented field was quite a natural direction for me. But I kept hesitating between marine biology, geology and oceanography for quite a long time though. In the end, this is probably why I became an ecologist, because it allows me to study species interactions not only with each other but also with their physical environment, so I still get connections with other oceans sciences.

How did you get involved in studying cetaceans specifically? Do you have any favourites?

I have always been very interested in top predator ecology, although at first, I didn't think it could be my actual research focus. Initially I wanted to work on plankton, so quite the stretch here. But after a week of eco-volunteering surveying cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea, an internship collecting data on bottlenose dolphin in Spain, and a MSc thesis on their habitat-use and vocal behaviour in Ireland, here I am, and very happy to be! I shouldn't pick, but my favourites are baleen whales, even though I also got to love the shy little harbour porpoise!

If you could study any other species what would it be?

More than on a particular species, I would love to work on polar ecosystems. Then if I could choose probably any other marine top predators would be interesting, maybe seabirds? Or at the complete opposite side of the food-chain, planktonic communities. They play such a key role in supporting and shaping ecosystems that I would also like to learn more about them.
To me, one of the best things about SeaMonitor so far had been the very collaborative approach of the project. As a PhD student, I feel lucky being part of a large team of passionate people from different fields working together and exchanging ideas, I learn a lot from it. Hearing about everyone's success and discoveries is very motivating and despite some difficulties along the way, I think the project will have great outputs. I am really looking forward to analysing more of the cetacean datasets now, and I am particularly excited about the glider work.

**What advice would you give to young people today who are considering a career in marine biology?**

I’m not very far in my career and still a student, but from an aspiring marine biologist to another I would say go for it! The journey so far has been fun, very rewarding and a constant learning. First advice I could give is to keep your interests broad. Marine biology is a very wide field, so chances are you don't know yet your future work topic even exists. It is also a very multidisciplinary and collaborative field; we achieve more working not only together with biologists with different expertise but also with engineers, oceanographers, statisticians, programmers, policy makers... The traditional science/biology study track might be the most straightforward, but in the end, there are many more ways to get involved in marine biology if you really want to. My second advice would be “Be prepared to be resilient“. It applies to many jobs, but working in a natural, unpredictable environment and on wild animals means a lot of things are out of our control. Almost never is the first try the good one, so there is probably a lot of problem solving and troubleshooting ahead of you, but it’s worth it!

**What question about the marine environment would you most like an answer to?**

It's hard to pick because there is so much we don't know that we really need to know! In the context of my work at SeaMonitor, I would really like to know more about inshore fisheries - where they go, what they are doing, and how seals interact with them.