



Impact Report 2024 - 2026

ADVANCING THE SCIENCE
AND CONSERVATION

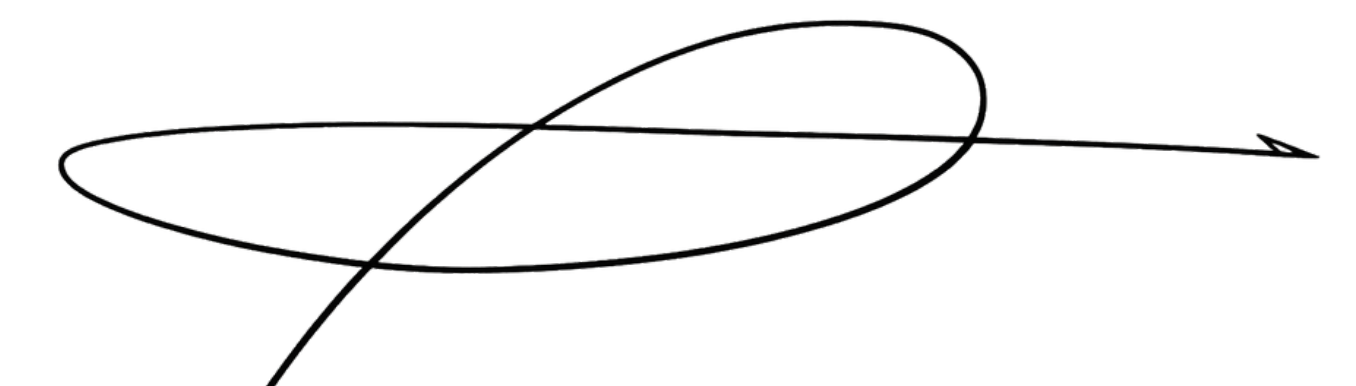
VLORE, ALBANIA
NEUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



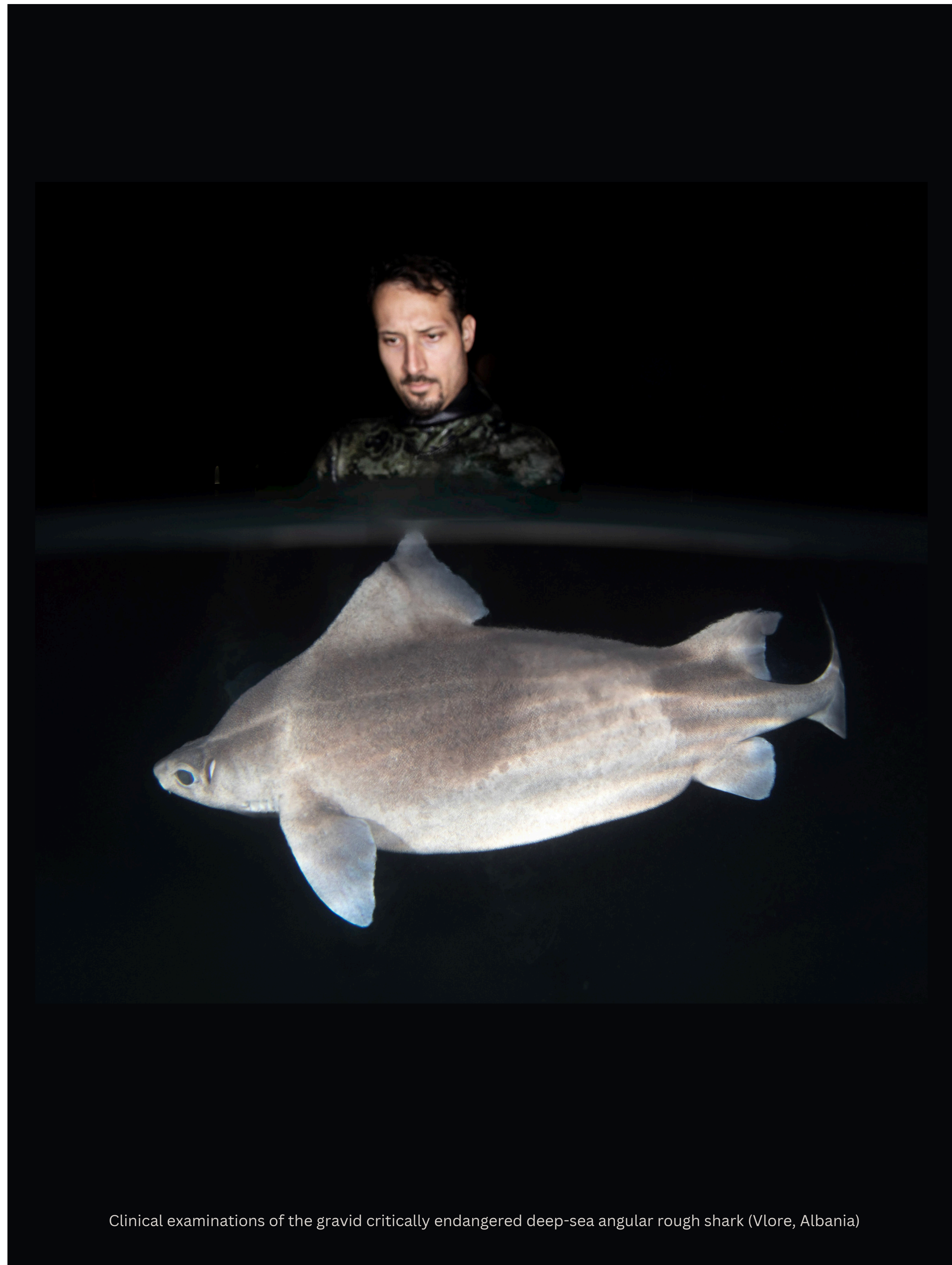
A word from the Founder

Between May 2024 and May 2026, our team spent more than 300 days in the field, documenting over 200,000 elasmobranchs across the Adriatic and conducting detailed clinical and biological examinations on nearly 40,000 individuals representing 31 species through our laboratories and rehabilitation clinics. During this period, our work contributed to important discoveries involving some of the Mediterranean's rarest and most threatened species, while also generating 14 scientific publications in leading journals. At the same time, Sharklab ADRIA represented the work at major international events, while global media coverage through 500 features in National Geographic, BBC, CNN, Forbes and many others generated over 100 million views.

Yet beyond the numbers, this report represents something far more important – the people behind the work. None of these achievements would have been possible without the trust of local fishing communities, the dedication of our researchers and students, and the support of partners, institutions and supporters who believed that meaningful conservation can still emerge from small, independent and field-driven initiatives. Despite major scientific gaps and increasing environmental pressures facing the Adriatic Sea, these two years have shown that impactful discoveries, conservation action and global scientific contributions are still possible when science, collaboration and persistence come together with purpose.



ANDREJ A. GAJIĆ
Principal Investigator, Ph.D. (res. vet. med.)



Clinical examinations of the gravid critically endangered deep-sea angular rough shark (Vlore, Albania)

Field Research

Between May 2024 and May 2026, Sharklab ADRIA conducted more than 300 days of field research across the Adriatic Sea, representing one of the region's most intensive independent monitoring programs focused on sharks, rays and chimaeras.

Research activities were carried out in collaboration with more than 25 fishing and research vessels operating across coastal, pelagic and deep-sea environments, with over 5,000 fishing hauls and fisheries operations examined during the reporting period. This extensive field presence enabled continuous monitoring of species diversity, fisheries interactions, post-capture survival and the occurrence of rare and threatened elasmobranch species throughout the southern Adriatic. Field operations combined fisheries-dependent monitoring with advanced marine research techniques including technical diving expeditions, underwater habitat assessments and deep-water ROV surveys. These approaches supported the documentation of critical habitats, behavioural observations and rare deep-sea species rarely encountered through conventional research methods, while also strengthening long-term collaboration with local fishing communities across the region.



At-vessel observer program examining catch rates, species diversity, encounter frequency, and post-capture clinical condition



First record of the elusive *Heptranchias perlo* documented with Egyptian fishermen in Vlorë, who reported the finding (currently 26 records)



Field work around midnight after receiving a call from fishermen about accidentally caught sharks, to assess whether individuals could be released

+ 300 days
+ 25 vessels
+ 5.000 hauls
+ 200.000 individuals

Advanced Research

Sharklab ADRIA applies a multidisciplinary scientific approach combining advanced laboratory diagnostics, medical imaging and conservation-focused research methodologies to better understand the biology, health status, fisheries impacts and survival potential of sharks, rays and chimaeras in the Adriatic Sea.

Over the past two years, our research programs integrated field monitoring with advanced analytical techniques including histology, radiology, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), X-ray diagnostics, spectroscopy, toxicological screening and pathological examinations. These methods have been used to investigate internal injuries, skeletal trauma, organ damage, post-capture physiological stress, contaminant exposure and species-specific recovery potential following fisheries interactions - delivering data vital for conservation.

Through detailed histopathological analysis, imaging diagnostics and toxicological investigations, Sharklab ADRIA has been able to identify injuries and physiological impacts often invisible during standard external examinations, providing some of the region's first detailed insights into the hidden consequences of capture stress and fisheries-induced trauma in threatened elasmobranch species. Advanced imaging systems, including X-ray and MRI diagnostics, have been particularly important in evaluating internal trauma, spinal injuries, hook damage and survivability assessments in rare and critically endangered species. In parallel, spectroscopy and toxicological analyses have supported ongoing investigations into heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants, microplastics and emerging contaminants affecting Adriatic marine ecosystems and vulnerable elasmobranch populations.

By integrating laboratory science with frontline field conservation, Sharklab ADRIA continues to advance one of the Adriatic region's most comprehensive independent research programs dedicated to understanding and protecting threatened sharks and rays through evidence-based science.

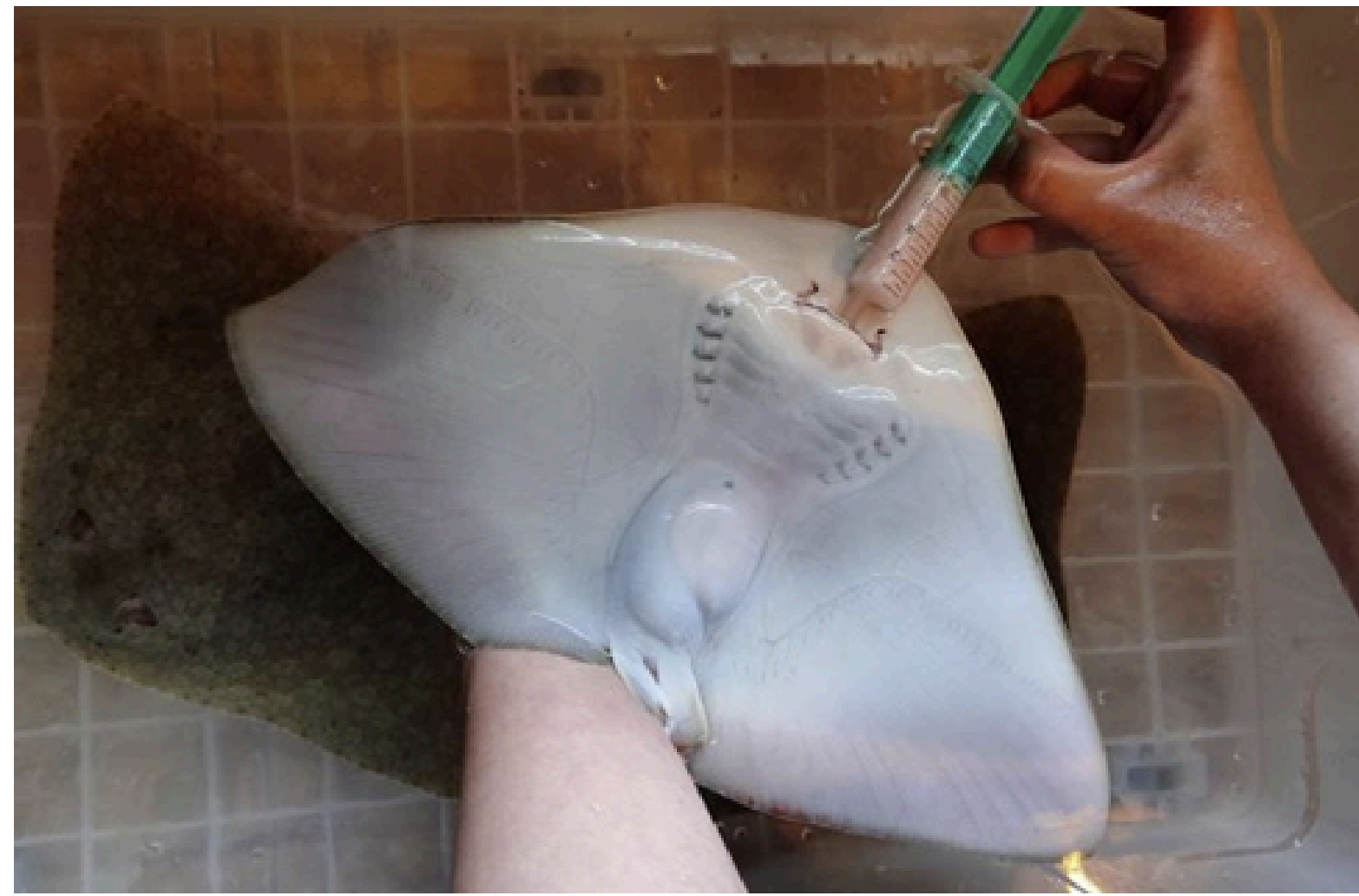


Post-capture survival

Post-capture survival research represents one of Sharklab ADRIA's primary scientific and conservation priorities. Through continuous collaboration with fisheries and long-term field monitoring, the program investigates the physiological stress, injury patterns and survival potential of sharks and rays following capture and release.

Between May 2024 and May 2026, 213 of live individuals representing multiple threatened species were clinically assessed, rehabilitated and monitored through rapid-response field interventions and laboratory-supported examinations. Research activities combined external assessments with advanced diagnostic methods including radiology, histology, toxicology and physiological analysis to better understand the often hidden impacts of fisheries interactions.

The program generated some of the Adriatic region's first detailed insights into post-capture trauma, internal injuries, recovery potential and species-specific responses to capture stress, contributing critical scientific data for improving fisheries management, handling protocols and evidence-based conservation strategies for threatened elasmobranchs.



Manual tube feeding of critically endangered spiny butterfly ray (*Gymnura altavela*) fetuses during in vitro incubation.



Releasing a lesser-spotted catshark pup hatched from an egg retrieved from a deceased female and incubated in the laboratory



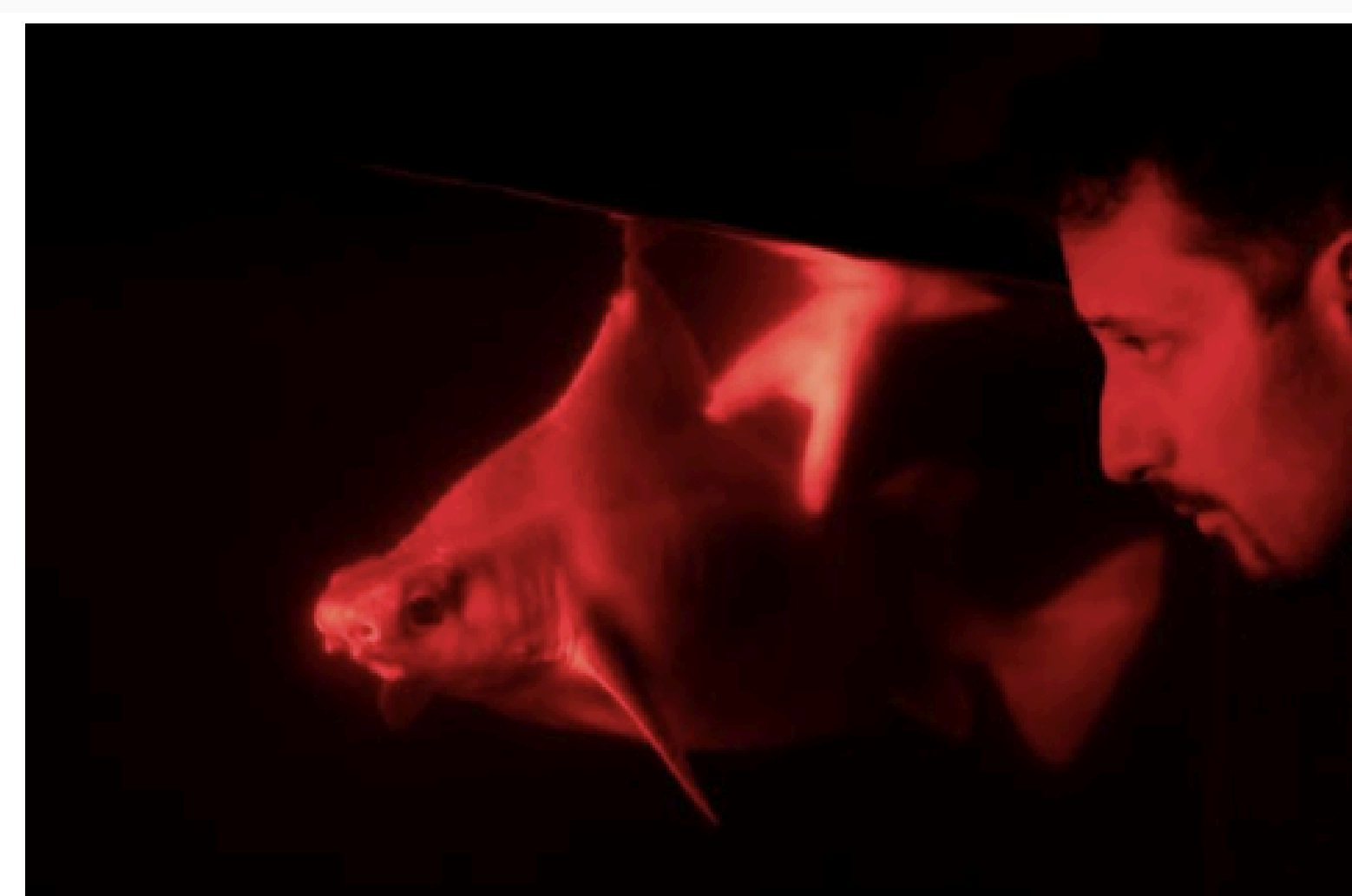
Local fishermen from the St. Nicholas artisanal vessel releasing the large gravid Spiny butterfly ray (*Gymnura altavela*) during the call with Sharklab ADRIA



Post-release dive with a rough shark (*Oxynotus centrina*) to observe behavior and assess clinical recovery



Reproductive clinical examination of a lesser-spotted catshark (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) during egg-laying in rehabilitation following commercial trawl capture.



Clinical examinations of a critically endangered rough shark (*Oxynotus centrina*) conducted every 15 minutes over 24 hours

Scientific PUBLICATIONS



FULL CITATION	METRICS
Gajić, A., Conceição, P.M.P., Pereira, M.J., Beširović, H., Karalić, E., & Alves, A. (2026). First insights into population structure, evidence of a nursery area, and genetic composition of the velvet belly lanternshark, <i>Etmopterus spinax</i> (Linnaeus, 1758), in the Adriatic Sea (Central Mediterranean). <i>Fisheries Research</i> , 297, 107733.	Q1 (IF 2.5)
Sehli, O., Capapé, C., Neuman, E., Karalić, E., Gayford, J. H., Lelo, S., Beširović, H., Gajić, A. (2026). First confirmed records of the Tortonese's stingray <i>Dasyatis tortonesei</i> (Elasmobranchii: Dasyatidae) in the Adriatic Sea with notes on diagnostic characters and conservation implications. <i>Mediterranean Marine Science</i> , 27(1), 184-192.	Q2 (IF 2.3)
Franqui-Rivera, G., Gayford, J.H., Peña, N. Schizas, N. V., Tomić, N., & Gajić, A. (2026). A complex pigmentation disorder reveals energetic and ecological costs of coloration in a deep-sea sharpnose sevengill shark. <i>Journal of Fish Biology</i> , 1-10.	Q2 (IF 2.0)
Gajić, A., & Gayford, J. (2026). Insights into the rare Electric Ray, <i>Tetronarce nobiliana</i> (Bonaparte, 1835) from the eastern Adriatic Sea: novel records and deep-sea preferences. <i>Marine Biodiversity</i> , 56, 30.	Q2 (IF 1.5)
Gajić, A., Sulikowski, J.A., Rummer, J.L., Gayford, J.H., Karalić, E., Beširović, H., Latta, E.N., Møller P.R. (2025). First reported evidence of healing after a traumatic mandibular fracture with soft tissue avulsion in sevengill shark (<i>Heptranchias perlo</i>). <i>Journal of Fish Biology</i> , 1-7.	Q2 (IF 2.0)
Gajić, A. (2025). Documenting the first neonate and juvenile rare deep-sea kitefin shark (<i>Dalatias licha</i>) in the Adriatic Sea, with insight into fishery-induced trauma. <i>Environmental Biology of Fishes</i> , 108, 1589-1598.	Q2 (IF 1.8)
Gajić, A., De Loose, E., Martin, A. G., Neuman, E., Karalić, E., Beširović, H., & Gayford, J. H. (2025). Two's company: monozygotic twinning in the small spotted catshark (<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>). <i>Journal of Fish Biology</i> , 107, 662-666.	Q2 (IF 2.0)

FULL CITATION	METRICS
Gajić, A., & Martin, A. G. (2025). The first evidence of long-term survival of the deep-sea Blackmouth catshark (<i>Galeus melastomus</i>) following release from bottom longline fisheries. <i>Fisheries Management and Ecology</i> , 32(5), 349-353.	Q2 (IF 2.2)
De Loose, E., Gayford, J. H., Karalić, E., Annibaldi, A., Girolametti, F., Illuminati, S., Beširović, H., & Gajić, A. (2025). Trace element concentration and toxicity in blackspotted smooth-hound sharks (<i>Mustelus punctulatus</i>) from the southern Adriatic Sea: implications for consumer safety. <i>Marine Pollution Bulletin</i> , 213, 117630	Q1 (IF 5.3)
Gajić, A., de Loose, E., Martin, A. G., Neuman, E., & Karalić, E. (2025). First description of leucism in the deep-sea angular rough shark (<i>Oxynotus centrina</i>) and the first documented pigment disorder in family Oxynotidae Gill, 1912. <i>Journal of Fish Biology</i> , 106, 649-653.	Q2 (IF 2.0)
Gajić, A., & Sulikowski, J. (2024). From rarity to reality: the hidden abundance of critically endangered deep-sea little gulper shark (<i>Centrophorus uyato</i>) in the southern Adriatic Sea. <i>Mediterranean Marine Science</i> , 25(3), 641-649.	Q1 (IF 2.5)
Gajić, A. (2024). The first report of adult blue shark surviving severe head impalement by a swordfish, with an overview of similar incidents. <i>Marine Biodiversity</i> , 54(73), 1-4.	Q2 (IF 1.8)
Gajić, A., & Karalić, E. (2024). Rediscovery and urgent conservation needs for the critically endangered Spiny butterfly ray (<i>Gymnura altavela</i>) in the Adriatic Sea. <i>Animal Conservation</i> , 27, 581-584.	Q1 (IF 3.5)
Gajić, A. (2024). Exploring the elusive deep-sea sharpnose sevengill shark (<i>Heptranchias perlo</i>) in the Adriatic Sea: novel records, health assessments and conservation implications. <i>Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems</i> , 34(3), e4122.	Q1 (IF 2.6)

Internship program

Over the past two years, Sharklab ADRIA has developed one of the world's most intensive hands-on training and internship programs focused on sharks, rays in the Adriatic Sea. Between May 2024 and May 2026, the program hosted more than 35 interns, students and young researchers from over 25 countries worldwide, providing direct hands-on experience in fisheries monitoring, shark and ray handling, rehabilitation procedures, advanced laboratory analysis, conservation science and field research methodologies.

Unlike traditional academic placements, the Sharklab ADRIA internship program is built around real-time frontline conservation work. Participants are directly involved in daily field operations, scientific sampling, rehabilitation and release efforts, fisheries collaboration, and laboratory examinations involving some of the Mediterranean's rarest and most threatened elasmobranch species. During this period, interns and academic collaborators participated in the examination and documentation of more than 20,000 sharks and rays, while also contributing to the rehabilitation and successful release of hundreds of individuals affected by fisheries interactions and environmental stress. The program also contributed directly to academic and scientific advancement, supporting 7 academic theses in collaboration with international universities and contributing to 6 scientific publications published in leading international journals. Beyond technical skills, the internship program aims to create a new generation of scientists and conservationists capable of combining rigorous scientific research with practical field conservation, interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement.

Today, Sharklab ADRIA continues to serve as an international platform connecting students, researchers and conservation practitioners through one of the Adriatic region's most active independent marine research and rehabilitation initiatives.

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The Sharklab ADRIA is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, offering a unique opportunity to learn about sharks in a way that isn't possible anywhere else. Being able to observe and study these animals up close and in detail has been an incredible and unforgettable experience. I don't believe I could have gained this kind of knowledge anywhere else, and I am deeply grateful to Sharklab, Andrej, and Emina for having me.

Patrícia Conceição (Portugal)

THESIS 2025



“

I feel like I learned more here than during my entire university studies. This experience really opened my eyes to the reality of conservation work, things that are hard to fully understand from books or lectures. One of the most striking moments happened one night, around 1 a.m., when we went to the lab and were faced with hundreds, almost 700, dead catsharks. My supervisor constantly pushed us to go further, to do better, and to become the best version of ourselves, while still being supportive.

Clara Carneiro (France)

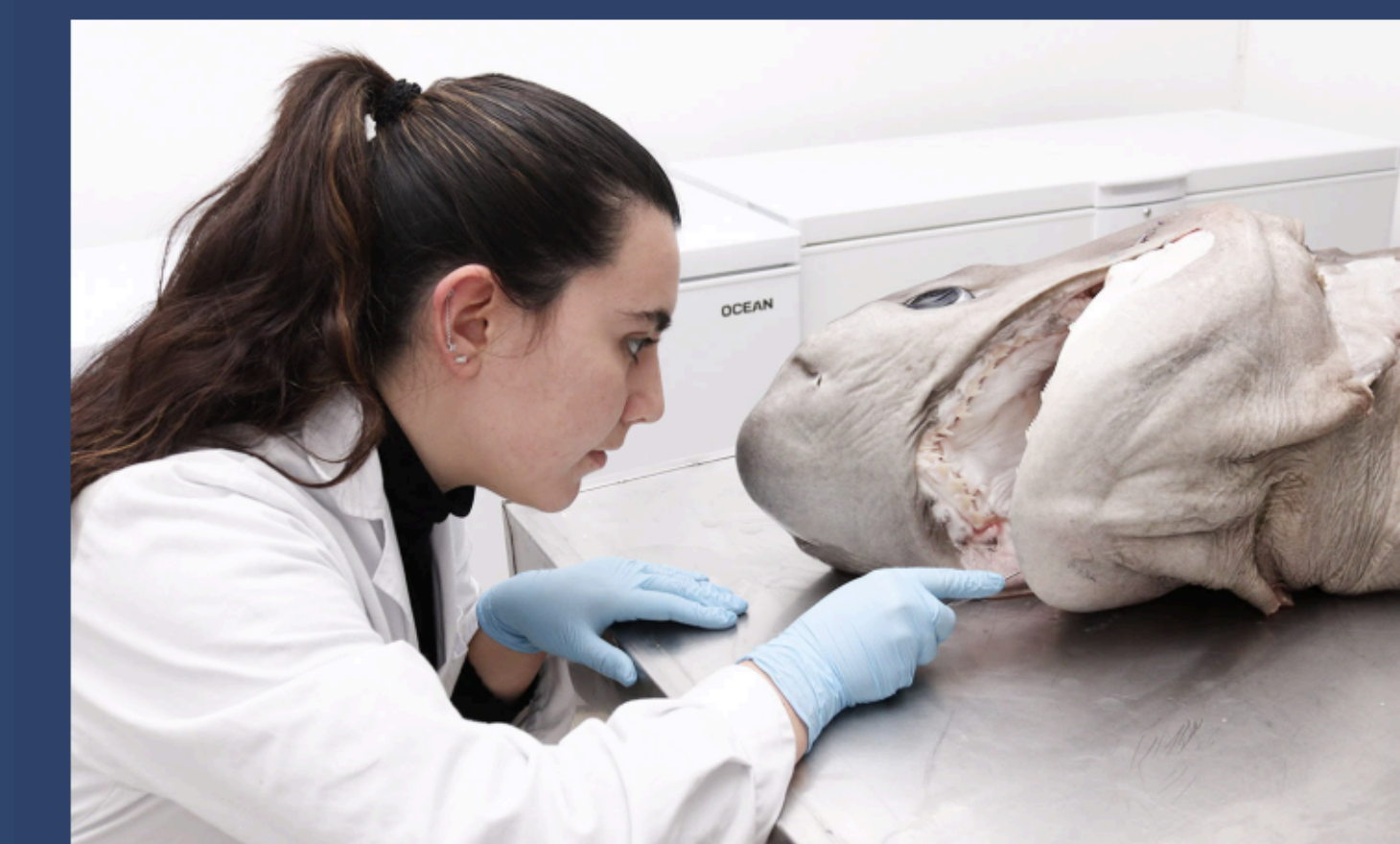
INTERNSHIP 2025

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Both internships were life-changing for my career. I discovered a whole new perspective on my work and realized that I'm truly devoted to it. I deeply appreciated that the internship offered a mix of lab work, fieldwork, lectures, and fruitful discussions. I formed core memories that will never be forgotten. Andrej and Emina's support has left me more inspired than ever and prepared to advance my career in shark conservation.

Olfa Sehli, M.Sc. (Tunisia)

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE 2024, 2025 I, 2025 II



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My first internship was so exciting and enriching, both on a personal and professional level, that I decided to return to do my thesis. The level of knowledge I gained was phenomenal, and the experience expanded in a monumental way. If Sharklab ADRIA is the living body where my aspirations thrive, then Andrej and Emina are undeniably the brilliant mind and compassionate heart.

Andrea Garcia Martin (Spain)

INTERNSHIP 2023, THESIS 2024, PRACTICE 2025

Global Media Coverage

