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## **Rare species reported in Malta jellyfish spotting campaign**



One of the rarer sightings: a cigar jellyfish (*Olindias phosphoric*).

So far, over 200 sightings of different jellyfish species have been submitted by the public as part of the Spot the Jellyfish campaign.

These can be viewed online at <http://193.188.45.233/jellyfish/stats.html>, which features a summary map depicting jellyfish occurrence and distribution.

The campaign, which was launched last May jointly by the International Ocean Institute-Malta Operational Centre (IOI-MOC) at the University of Malta and the Malta Tourism Authority, has recorded various uncommon jellyfish and other gelatinous species. These include the blue button (*Porpita porpita*) and the cigar jellyfish (*Olindias phosphorica*), with the former being characteristic of warmer, tropical waters.

Various pyrosome and salp individuals were also recorded, some of which weighing up to 1.5 kg. These are not jellyfish but pelagic tunicates (sea squirts). They do not sting and are among the fastest growing marine organisms.

A variety of ctenophores (comb jellies) was also recorded, which generally lack stinging tentacles and have sticky ones instead.

The initial surge in reports for the mauve stinger (*Pelagia noctiluca*) reported in June subsided somewhat in July, with reports for this common stinging jellyfish going down by as much as half. No other Portuguese Man o' War were reported during July.

The Spot the Jellyfish initiative, which is coordinated by IOI-MOC director Aldo Drago, is being implemented by Alan Deidun and staff of the centre. It is supported by the MTA, Nature Trust, Friends of the Earth, and the Ekoskola and the Blue Flag Malta programmes.

The initiative follows a citizen science approach and relies on the collaboration of the public, sea farers, divers, and especially youngsters – through their teachers and parents – who are encouraged to assist in recording the presence and location of different jellyfish through the use of a reporting leaflet.

The leaflet is being widely distributed, and can be downloaded from the website [www.ioikids.net/jellyfish](http://www.ioikids.net/jellyfish), which also contains snippets of information and anecdotes about different jellyfish species. With the support of MTA, large posters have also been put up on boards at major bays.

Reporting is done by simply matching the sighted jellyfish with a simple visual identification guide, giving the date and time of the sighting, and indicating the number of individuals seen. Sightings can be reported online, or by sending a text message to 7922 2278, or an e-mail message to [ioi-moc@um.edu.mt](mailto:ioi-moc@um.edu.mt).

Strange-looking jellyfish that are not included on the leaflet should be caught and kept in a bucketful of seawater prior to contacting Dr Deidun on e-mail [alan.deidun@um.edu.mt](mailto:alan.deidun@um.edu.mt) or other IOI-MOC staff to collect for definite identification of the species. If this is not possible, photos of the jellyfish should be taken and sent to the centre.