

Listening to the Deep

Voice-over 1:

It's a September morning off the coast of northern Sicily in Italy. A boat owned by environmentalists is carrying Laura Abbriano and her associates along the chain of offshore islands. The warm waters here are beloved by dolphins and whales, but growing tourism and industrial developments can cause the creatures harm. Laura's worried about this, because she sees the harm to mammals as a symptom of a bigger threat.

Voice-over 2:

We study whales and dolphins mainly because these animals are on the top of the food chain, and their behaviour allows us to determine the overall condition of our marine surroundings.

Voice-over 1:

It's all about balance. Like every natural environment, the underwater ecosystem is managed by the equilibrium between the various organisms that live in it. Any break in the food chain could have serious consequences for many species. The threats are plenty, particularly one human-caused pollution, which is dangerous and poorly understood: the contamination of the seas with artificial noise. Here at the Barcelona Aquarium in Spain, marine life is well protected behind the thick glass of their tank. In the open, seas animals can't escape from ever-mounting human intervention into their lives.

Voice-over 3:

What has to be understood is that some of the marine organisms, who've been living in this environment for millions of years, have adapted to it. In particular sea mammals, like whales and dolphins, who use sound for all their activities. If man's sources of noise contaminate the area the mammals live in, preventing them from correctly receiving the information, it'll put all their lives in danger.

Voice-over 1:

For whales and dolphins, sound is the primary means of learning about their immediate environment. They can't rely on their other senses, as the other senses' effectiveness, like sight, is limited in water. Loud man-made noises, such as industrial and military sonars, and maritime transport like propeller noise, can traumatise and incapacitate whales and dolphins.

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