

***Proteus* and education at the Speleovivarium »Erwin Pichl« in Trieste (Italy)**

Človeška ribica in izobraževanje v Speleovivariju »Erwin Pichl« v Trstu (Italija)

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The Speleovivarium »Erwin Pichl« is a museum and laboratory dedicated to cave biology and karst. It was started by Erwin Pichl and is currently run by Adriatic Caving Society in collaboration with the Civic Museum of Natural History of Trieste. It is located in the centre of the city of Trieste (Italy) in an artificial gallery that was an air-raid shelter excavated during the Second World War (Fig. 1). Physical characteristics of the gallery are very similar to those of karst caves, so it was easily converted into a laboratory for the study of *Proteus anguinus* (Fig. 2). It has been opened to the public as Speleovivarium in the 1990s. Our research on *Proteus* is now oriented towards ecological studies of feeding habits and distribution, with some direct ethological observation, and with the study of the skull, e.g. by X-ray computer microtomography using the TomoLab station at ELETTRA, Trieste. Special attention is paid to education, working with schools and tourists, in order to stimulate concrete conservation action and groundwater-friendly practice in karst areas (around 4,000 people visited the museum in 2014). Students (from schools and universities) have also been included in our scientific research with training courses and practical field activities. The next project will start in March 2016 with students of Scientific High School Galileo Galilei of Trieste. We will investigate caves and springs in the area of Doberdò (Gorizia, Italy) to monitor *Proteus* distribution and to better understand the night-time occurrence of *Proteus* in surface waters. The research will improve our knowledge on conservation status of *Proteus* and its habitat in Italy, with international cooperation, especially with scientists and cavers from Slovenia.



Figure 1. Interior of the Speleovivarium »Erwin Pichl«.
Slika 1. Notranjost Speleovivarija »Erwin Pichl«.



Figure 2. *Proteus* in the Speleovivarium »Erwin Pichl«.
Slika 2. Človeška ribica v Speleovivariju »Erwin Pichl«.