



Formal Presentation Abstracts
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**MOUTH BIOPSY UNDER VOLUNTARY BEHAVIOR
IN A FEMALE BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN**

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In 2003, irregular and rough small vesicles, ranging from pale to dark pink, appeared on the floor of the mouth, right under the tongue, of Cher, a 37-year-old female *Tursiops truncatus*.

In 2002, the animal had undergone a voluntary vaginal biopsy, where an abnormal mass had appeared, which was later identified to be a *Papillomavirus* by immunohistochemistry and from which the DNA has recently been sequenced.

Considering the likelihood of a viral etiology of the lesions in the mouth and the possibility of the contagious spread of the disorder, a biopsy was scheduled. Due to Cher's calm, very trusting nature and her advanced husbandry training, our team decided to conduct the biopsy under voluntary behavioral control rather than using physical restraint. Our main goal was to avoid accidental injury to the female during the procedure and not to disturb the dolphin's perception of her relationship with the training and medical teams.

Due to the physiological nature of the sample area, an apparatus was developed in order to guarantee Cher's comfort (and more specifically to hold her tongue away from the area and any sharp material), her immobility and an easier access to the target area. The training was simple and relatively fast - it included posture training and local desensitization, using positive reinforcement, to eventually be able to collect the needed biological material.

The procedure was successfully carried out in March 2004, allowing our medical team to identify the nature of the lesion and to decide on the veterinarian protocol to be implemented.

