

{rokbox title=|Ophiura sp. abrazando un briozoo (imagen tomada con un ROV durante la campaña INDEMARES-CANAL) :: COB-IEO| thumb=|images/stories/ieo/imagenespublicaciones/reteporella_640_thumb.jpg|}images/stories/ieo/imagenespublicaciones/reteporella_640.jpg{/rokbox}

C. Barberá, J. Moranta, F. Ordines, M. Ramón, A. de Mesa, M. Díaz-Valdés, A. M. Grau and E. Massutí

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[Biodiversity and habitat mapping of Menorca Channel \(western Mediterranean\): implications for conservation.](#)

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Abstract: Menorca Channel (Balearic Islands, western Mediterranean) comprises 98,700 Ha of continental shelf. It has been proposed to include this area in the Natura 2000 network due to the wide range of species and habitats of high conservation value found here, such as *Posidonia oceanica* meadows and maërl and coralligenous beds. This study aimed to establish a scientific basis for managing and protecting the continental shelf bottoms in Menorca Channel. Sampling was carried out with side-scan sonar, beam trawls, box corers, a remote-operated vehicle and an underwater drop camera. The information collected was used to map the habitat distribution between 50 and 100 m depth, as well as make an inventory and describe the spatial patterns of both the specific and functional diversity. A total of 636 species was recorded in a mosaic of habitats in which Corallinacea calcareous algae and other soft red algae (*Osmundaria volubilis* and *Peyssonnelia* spp.) were the most abundant groups. Hotspots of specific and functional diversity were located in areas with high habitat heterogeneity and complexity. Protection of Menorca Channel should not only include the habitats and species in the European directives, but also the habitats that are not currently protected, such as *O. volubilis* and *Peyssonnelia* beds, due to their biogeographical and ecological interest and their contribution to the biodiversity of shelf bottoms in the Mediterranean Sea.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Conservation, Management, Seabed, Habitats, Benthos, Maërl, Functional diversity, EUNIS, Mediterranean