

Valérie Burgener

Sailing to Barcelona Research & Communications Assistant, IUCN (Switzerland)



Valérie has a long-standing interest for marine conservation. Although born in the Swiss Alps she has always been attracted to the sea and to all the fascinating creatures living there. At age 15, she began sailing in the Mediterranean, taking part in whale surveys, first as a volunteer and later as an associate scientist. After having studied Biology at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, she did her master's thesis in Greece, the subject of which was "Distribution of sperm whales and Cuvier's beaked whales using GIS techniques".

In 2004, Valérie co-founded the non-profit organization "Participe Futur" and actively worked on the achievement of a sailing expedition in 2005 from the Mediterranean to Spitsbergen and back, using *Alcyon*, a 12.80m sailing boat. Valerie was onboard for the entire duration of this 8 month-long scientific/educational trip. This unique experience made her realize how important it is to "get the big picture" – understand the complexity of marine ecosystems – and witness the effects of human impact even in places considered as pristine. Today, Valerie is still actively involved with the small NGO and acts as project manager on her free time.

In 2006, Valerie undertook an Advanced Certificate in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. This intensive course was a great opportunity to learn more about different aspects of marine conservation, such as economics, governance and communication.

Lately, Valérie has worked for the WWF Global Bycatch Initiative (GBI) based in Gland, Switzerland, where she made an inventory of the network's projects on bycatch and helped to develop the GBI website and other communication tools. She joined the *Sailing to Barcelona* team in April and every ingredient of this initiative – passion, sailing, action and conservation – make her proud to be part of it.

Valerie lives in Geneva and works at IUCN headquarters in Gland. In the weekends, she is very often ski touring/hiking in the mountains or paying a short visit to *Alcyon*, moored near Marseilles.