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Cetacean monitoring in South coast of the mainland Portugal

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Introduction:

Information available on the occurrence and distribution of cetaceans in mainland Portugal is very limited, and most of the information comes from strandings and localized and limited surveys. Since 2010, a low-cost project, using whale watching boats as platforms of opportunity was established in the South coast of Portugal, in the Algarve region. This allowed the collection of more consistent data in the area.

Methods and Results:

From 2010 to 2012, four companies with a total of seven boats were used during the summer period (May to October). A total effort of 3768 hours was done in these whale watching platforms.

As a result, nine species of cetaceans were reported.

Odontocetes accounted for 97% of the total number of sightings. During these three years, a total of 1477 cetaceans sightings were recorded (**Fig.1 & 2**). The most sighted species was the short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) (**Fig.3**) with 1062 sightings, followed by the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) with 239 sightings and the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) with 86 sightings.

Regarding the mysticetes, four species were identified being the minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) (**Fig.4**) the most sighted with a total of 30 sightings.

Most of the animals were found near the coast line up to 10 nautical miles.



Figure 4. Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

References:

Castro, J. 2010. Characterization of Cetaceans in the South coast of Portugal between Lagos and Cape São Vicente. Master thesis, Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon.

Laborde, M.I., Gonçalves, J. N., Verborgh, P., de Stephanis, R., Castro, J. (2011). Cetacean research network in the South of Portugal: establishing a low-cost and long-term monitoring programme. 25th Conference of the European Cetacean Society, Cadiz.

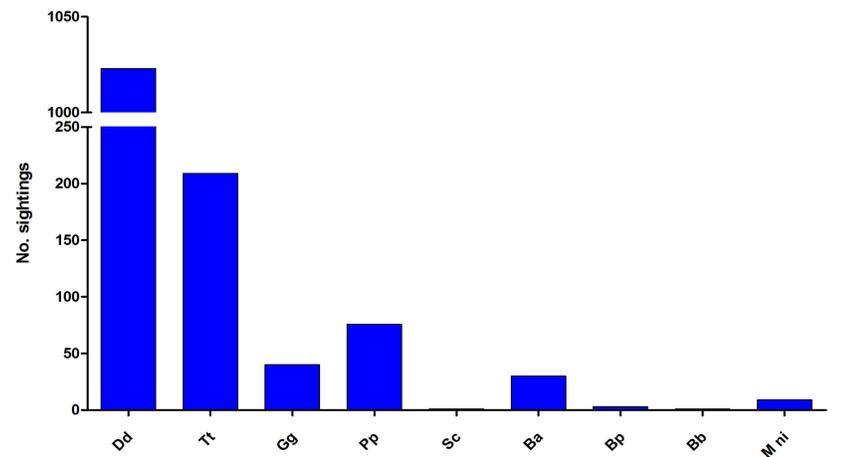


Figure 1. Total sightings recorded by species: common dolphin (Dd), common bottlenose dolphin (Tt), risso's dolphin (Gg), harbour porpoise (Pp), striped dolphin (Sc), minke whale (Ba), fin whale (Bp), sei whale (Bb) and non identified mysticetes (M ni).

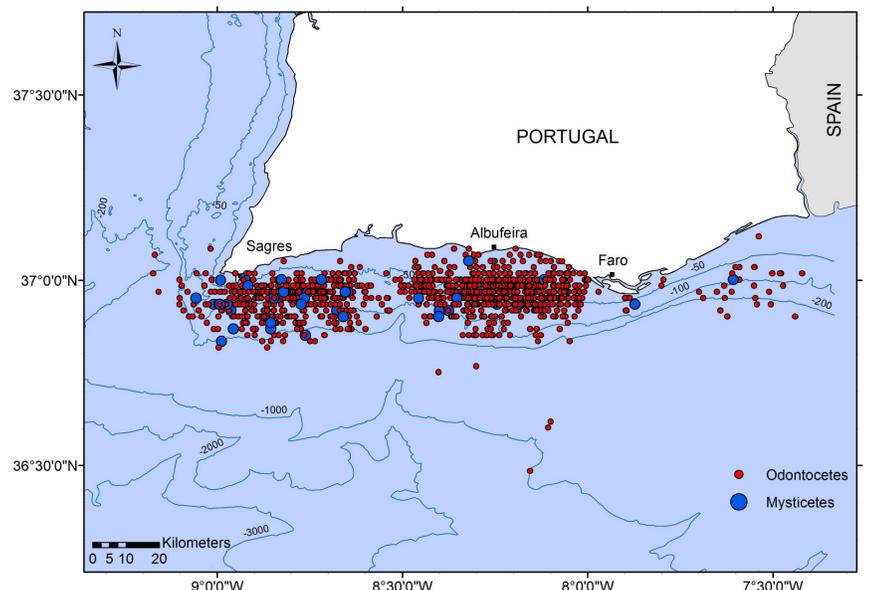


Figure 2. Cetaceans sightings distribution in Southern Portugal.



Figure 3. Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*)

Discussion and Conclusions:

These results strongly suggest that the **South coast of Portugal is an important area for different species of cetaceans**. Further studies on behavior, habitat use and photo identification are essential to better understand the importance of the region, and to look at possible residence patterns of the different species.

Acknowledgments:

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