

## EVIDENCE FOR BOTTOM SWIMMING AND CONTACT BEHAVIOR BY THE ESTUARINE DOLPHIN *Sotalia guianensis*: FEEDING STRATEGY OR TACTILE SENSATION?

ROSSI-SANTOS, MARCOS R.<sup>1,2</sup>, L. L. WEDEKIN<sup>3</sup> & S. F. RONDINELLI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Projeto Boto Sotalia/ Instituto Baleia Jubarte. Rua 7 de setembro, 178, Caravelas, Bahia, Brasil. 45900-000. [mrosantos@pop.com.br](mailto:mrosantos@pop.com.br)

<sup>2</sup>Pós Graduação em Zoologia / Universidade Federal do Paraná.

<sup>3</sup>Instituto Synthesis. Av. Rio Branco, 380, sala 407, Centro, 88015-200, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil.

*Reunión de Trabajos de Especialistas en Mamíferos Acuáticos de América del Sur, 11; Congreso de la Sociedad Latinoamericana de Especialista en Mamíferos Acuáticos - SOLAMAC, 5. Quito, Ecuador. 2004b. p. 34.*

As a part of the ongoing long-term research project about the ecology of the estuarine dolphin *Sotalia guianensis* in the southern region of Bahia State, Brazil, we present here observational and photographic evidences for bottom swimming and contact behavior by the dolphins. From April 2002 to January 2004 (954,8 hours of total effort and 134,8 hours of direct observations), it was noted evidences of such behavior in 11 occasions. During field data collection we could observe and register when dolphins surfaced with the dorsal fin, and sometimes with the dorsum and head covered by mud. In these events, it was noted active feeding movements, with fish school leaping and escaping in front of the chasing dolphins, and some of them were also registered manipulating the prey with the mouth. In some occasions we could also see some movement of turbid water on the surface that could potentially indicate that dolphins were passing by the bottom and lifting the sediment. Later we could confirm by the taken photos the presence of mud attached to the dolphin's body. The presence of bottom prey species for *S. guianensis* diet is reported in the literature as sole fishes and shrimps, supporting the hypothesis of potential bottom feeding strategies to catch them. Our data analysis shows that the association of foraging behavior and swimming or traveling is the most frequent behavioral pattern observed in the area. The contact of the animal with the bottom is largely reported for several cetacean species and behaviors, mainly related to feeding behavior. The occurrence of this behavior corroborates the view that a great behavioral flexibility could be observed for the species. This diversity of feeding strategies may reflect the generalist feeding habits of the estuarine dolphin, exploring several prey types of various depths. By the other hand, this behavior also could be interpreted as a process to take off skin parasites or, simply, passing by the mud fluid for a tactile sensation. This is the first report of the bottom swimming and contact behavior for *S. guianensis* along its distribution.

This work was supported by **Aracruz Celulose S.A.**

Key words: Behavior, Bottom swimming, *Sotalia guianensis*