

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) photo-identification in Brazil: aspects of habitat use in two different breeding areas

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The Brazilian coast is visited by humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) during the austral winter. The Abrolhos Bank (16°40' - 19°30'S and 38°00 - 39°30'W) is considered their most important breeding ground in the Southwestern Atlantic Ocean. Nevertheless, during the last years the sightings of humpbacks are increasing in the northern coast of Bahia state in the waters surrounding Salvador city (13°01'S - 38 °32'W), about 240 nautical miles north of Abrolhos Bank. In this study, we compared the occupation and occurrence of humpbacks between these two sites. We also compared 2,800 whales photo-identified between 1992 and 2003 in Abrolhos bank with 400 individuals identified in North Coast between 2001 and 2003. Only one match was found between these areas during this study. Some differences in the duration of the breeding season were noted during these first years of monitoring. At Abrolhos Bank the humpback whales remain from July to November (5 months) while in the North Coast the sightings begin around two weeks later and last only until October (3 months). The proportion of calves was also different. In Abrolhos Bank, 350 (15%) out of 2,331 individuals composing 994 different groups were newborn calves. On the other hand, in the North Coast this proportion is considerably smaller, with 42 (6.5%) out of 642 whales sighted in 284 groups being newborn calves. The results found here may reflect differences in the use of these two adjacent breeding areas by the humpback whales off Brazil. Continuing monitoring of the humpbacks from the North Coast is recommended in order to clarify the reasons of these differences. The proximity of this area to an urban center makes it a potential whale watching site and reinforces the need of a long term monitoring program.