

Occurrence and distribution of odontocetes in the Abrolhos Bank , Southern Bahia, Brazil, with emphasis on Sotalia guianensis conservation.

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During a long term research on humpback whales off Abrolhos Bank, Brazil, some odontocetes species were sighted in the course of cruises and shore-based surveys. Within a 7 years period (1997 - 2002), species, group size and behavioral data were collected during 175 sightings. Dolphin species were identified in 119 (68%) observations: 92 (77%) pods of *Sotalia guianensis*, 16 (13%) of *Tursiops truncatus* and 11 (9%) of *Steno bredanensis* were sighted. The more frequent behaviors were foraging (n= 31) and traveling (n= 26). *Sotalia* group sizes varied from 1 to approximately 100 animals (mean = 6.7). In 6 occasions we observed groups with more than 20 dolphins. During 14 sightings we were able to identify dolphins species nearby the whales, showing probable interaction: *T. truncatus* (n= 4), *S. guianensis* (n= 2) and *S. bredanensis* (n=8). Abrolhos Archipelago region seems to be the most offshore area of occurrence to *S. guianensis* in its range of distribution, possibly because of the shallow and warm waters along the year in the region. Sightings of any species containing more than 20 animals could be related to more productive areas, with greater prey availability associated with propitious environmental conditions. Strandings of *Orcinus orca*, *Globicephala* sp., *Kogia* sp. and *Grampus griseus* indicate that others cetaceans could also use the area. These sightings suggest that this is an important region to odontocetes species besides being the main breeding ground for humpback whales in Northeastern coast of Brazil. However, the recent increase of barges traffic to transport wood and the potential establishment of oil exploitation activities in the region may affect cetaceans, and proper management of these anthropogenic actions should be done. In 2002 we began a research project to access distribution and behavior aspects of *S. guianensis* in the region.