

Recent movements of humpback whales from Abrolhos Bank, Brazil to South Georgia

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The available information regarding historical catches, as well as preliminary studies of telemetry (Zerbini et al. 2006) and photoidentification (Stevick et al. 2005) suggests that South Georgia/South Sandwich/Scotia Sea might be the feeding ground of the humpback whale breeding stock “A”. In order to evaluate the preliminary studies, an expedition was done in February/March to South Georgia, to look for photoidentification and collect biopsy samples. The Humpback Whale Institute staff departed from Mar del Plata, Argentina on January 28th and spent 21 days navigating in South Georgia and its surroundings. The total time of the expedition was 45 days, including the crossing. During this period, 62 cetaceans from 13 different species were surveyed, of which only two were identified as humpback whales. The dyad was observed 4 miles from South Georgia Island, and both the individuals were photoidentified and biopsied. Additionally, 18 humpback whales were photoidentified in South Sandwich Island by another vessel prior to the HWI Expedition, and the photographs were made available for us.

Three humpback whales previously photoidentified in Brazil in the years 1999 (#715), 2001 (# 1078) and 2002 (#1356) were also identified in South Sandwich in January 2006. The photoidentification comparison with 2500 animals from the Brazilian catalog and the genetic analyses are still in process.

In fact a very low density of cetaceans was observed in the sampled area. This occurrence might be related to the krill concentration or to other environmental conditions. These results suggest that the population of humpback whales registered during the whaling period did not return to this exact historical feeding ground.

Based on these results and the telemetry studies (Zerbini et al. *in press*), we might suppose that the primary aggregation for feeding of humpback whales from the BSA might be near the South Sandwich Island and secondly spread along the Scotia and Weddell Sea.

References:

Stevick PT, Pacheco de Godoy L, McOsker M, Engel MH, Allen A (*in review*) Movement of a humpback whale from Abrolhos Bank, Brazil to South Georgia (Antarctic Area II). *J.Cetacean Res.Manage*.

Zerbini, A.N., Andriolo, A, Heide-Jorgensen, M.A, Pizzorno, J.L., Maia, Y.G., VanBlaricom, G.R., DeMaster, D.G., Simoes-Lopes, P., Moreira, S., and Bethlem, C. (In press) Movements of satellite monitored humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in the Southwest Atlantic Ocean. *Marine Ecology Progress Serie*.

