

CETACEAN POPULATION IN COAST OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY: DIVERSITY AND DISTRIBUTION SPRING-SUMMER 2003-2004

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A study has been done to determine the diversity and distribution of cetaceans in spring and summer in the adjacent waters of the Basque Country in the Bay of Biscay. Shipboard visual surveys were conducted, in a 15 meters long boat according to the Spanish Cetacean Society methodological protocols. Samplings were made during spring and summer 2003 and 2004, sailing a total of 2.398.73 miles with correct observation effort, covering 7.532.32 Km². The data, both of sighting and observation effort, were analysed with a Geographic Information System (Arc view 3.2), and a Statistic program (SPSS 11.0). Thirteen different species were encountered in a total of 81 sightings. The most frequent species of cetacean observed during the season was the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) with 22 sightings (27 %), bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) with 17 (21 %), long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) 12 sightings (15 %), striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) with 10 (12 %), Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) 9 (11%), sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) 2 (2%), (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) 2 (2%), (*Mesoplodon gen.*) 2 (2%), harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) 1 (1%), orca (*Orcinus orca*) 1 (1%), short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), 1 (1%), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), 1 (1%), and minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), with one sighting (1%). From the data collected, the distribution of all the species with respect to the depth was examined. Significant differences were observed, between the rates of encounter in relation to the effort made and according to the depth, showing a non uniform distribution in the area. A greater presence in depths from 1200-2000 m is found located mainly in the zone of the canyon of Cap Breton (41% rate of encounter), the continental slope (35%) and 5 % in the continental platform, where the bottlenose dolphin was the species most frequently encountered.