

CETACEAN POPULATIONS STUDY IN THE GULF OF BISCAY AND SOUTH OF GREAT SOLE FROM FISHING BOATS

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During summer, the fishing boats of the Basque country sailed around the Gulf of Biscay and the area of Gran Sol aleatorically looking for fisheries of red tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*). During those transects they usually make sightings of cetacean species. In this scope, a research program started in 2003 to evaluate the possibility to use these platforms to identify hot spots for cetaceans during summer in these waters. Six boats of between 30 and 35 meters long and 10 meters high were used as sighting platforms. In 5 of those boats, the fishermen were formed to collect information on cetacean sightings. To calculate the effort, a group of biologist sailed onboard one of the boats following the observation protocols of the Spanish Cetacean Society and made transects in 2003 and 2004. In this boat, 3010 nautical miles were sailed with adequate sighting effort, covering an area of 44.240,227 square nautical miles. The data, both of sighting and observation effort, was analyzed with a Geographic Information System (Arc view 3.2), and a Statistic program SPSS 11. A total of 490 sightings were made, 221 with correct effort, on the boat with scientist, and 268 were opportunistic sightings (nº of sighting with effort/nº of opportunistic sighting) identifying 12 species. Fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) 64/54, (*Balaenoptera sp.*) 11/52, striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) 33/38, common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) 32/34, long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) 14/30, bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) 12/111 (1%), orca (*Orcinus orca*) 2/18, minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) 6/6. Fishing platforms are useful to study the relative distribution, diversity and abundance of cetaceans. The implication of the fishing sector in research programs is an ideal way for sea's sustainable management.