

Baleen whales in Southern Portugal: new insights



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INTRODUCTION

Baleen whales occurring in mainland Portugal are poorly studied and the conservation status of most of them is classified as “not evaluated”. The blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), fin whale (*B. physalus*), humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), minke whale (*B. acutorostrata*) and sei whale (*B. borealis*) have been recorded in these waters. Fin whale and sei whale are categorised as “endangered” and “vulnerable”, respectively (Cabral et al., 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Whale-watching vessels were used as platforms of opportunity to collect data for five consecutive seasons (2010 - 2014) in coastal waters of the south coast of Portugal. Photographs of the individuals were collected whenever possible to create photo-ID catalogues.

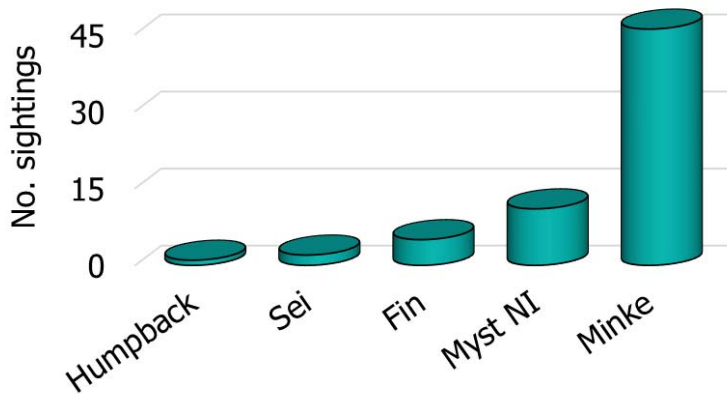


Fig. 1 Number of sightings of mysticetes from 2010 to 2014.



Fig. 3 Fin whale (*B. physalus*) – Algarve, Portugal.



Fig. 2 Minke whale (*B. acutorostrata*) – Algarve, Portugal.

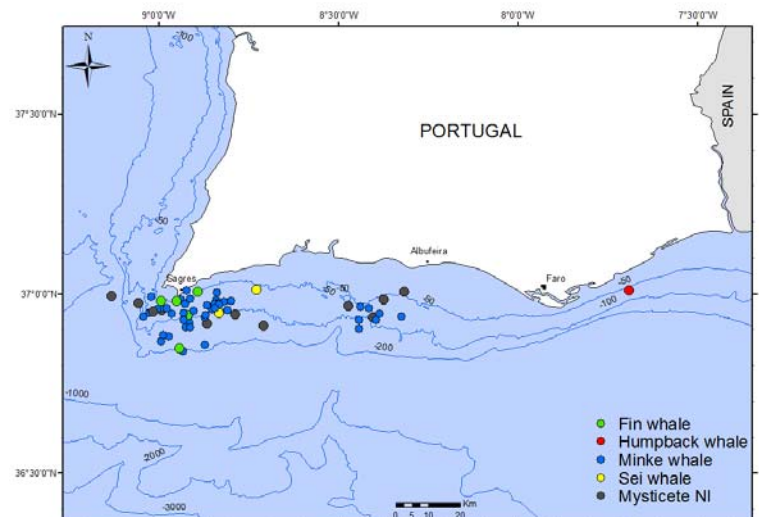


Fig. 4 Baleen whales sightings - Southern coast of Portugal (2010-2014).

DISCUSSION

Minke whales were by far the most sighted baleen whale in studied waters. Recaptures suggest a residential pattern of the population. However, these data is limited by the fact that whale-watching vessels usually circulate within 5 nmi from shore and barely beyond 10 nmi. As it is well known fin and sei whales have a preference for deep, offshore waters. Hence, it will be well worth it to undertake dedicated surveys allowing to explore deeper areas and better assess the importance of mysticetes in the region, particularly around the natural park of Costa Vicentina (SW coast) where they seem to occur more often. Conservation status may then be updated and information made available for decision makers on marine management.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank all whale-watching partners, as well as AIMM team members, interns and volunteers whose collaboration was essential to develop this study.

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