Whale watching profitability assessment in mainland Portugal

Joana CASTRO
jmadeiracastro@gmail.com

Castro, J.[1,3], Candeias, J.[1,3], Galego, S.[1,4], Fonseca, C.[1,3], Laborde, M. I.[1,2]

(1) AIMM – Marine Environment Research Association, Rua Maestro Frederico de Freitas Nº 15- 1º andar, 1500-399 Lisboa, Portugal
(2) Centro de Oceanografia, Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, Campus da FCUL, Campo Grande, 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal
(3) Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, Campus da FCUL, Campo Grande, 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal
(4) Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, Universidade do Algarve, Gambelas Campus 8005-139 Faro, Portugal

Introduction:

The whale-watching activity first appeared in mainland Portugal in 1998, mainly due to the resident bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) population in the Sado estuary (Hoyt, 2001), which turned the estuary into one of the best locations for dolphin watching in the mainland.

Since 2000 whale-watching activities began to grow exponentially and became one of the most important maritime-touristic activities in the south of Portugal (Castro, 2010) (Fig. 1). However, only in 2006 a specific law was created for the whale-watching activity in mainland Portugal - Decreto-Lei n.º 9/2006 .

Fig. 1 Whale-watching companies in Albufeira

Methods and Results:

Currently there are 16 companies with a total of 28 boats in southern Portugal with the legal permit to operate in the area between Tavira and Sagres (Fig. 2). However there are numerous companies operating without the required permit. Most of the companies operate two boats (64.3%) and, on average, the boats' capacity is 15 tourists (Fig. 3). The majority of the companies during the high season (June to September) operate 4 trips per day. The trips have a duration of 1h30 – 2h and the cost of each trip is between 30€ and 45€. During 2010 and 2011, 4 companies allowed us to determine their high season revenue from whale-watching tours. The total income during these two years was estimated to be ca. 1,377,145€ .

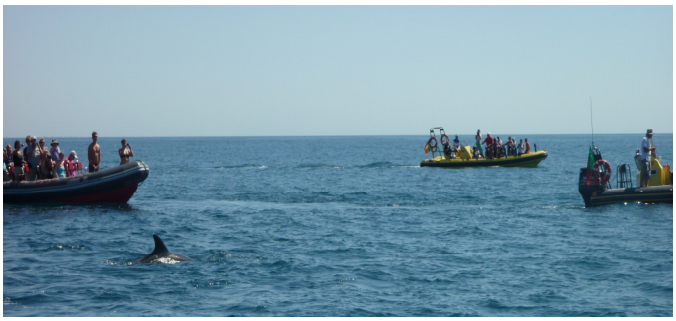

Fig. 2 Several whale-watching boats with a group of common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*).

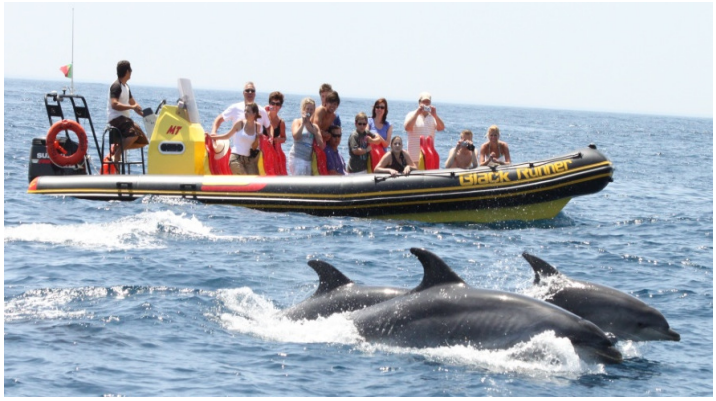

Fig. 3 Whale-watching boat with a group of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*).

Discussion and Conclusions:

This region is especially important since it has now the highest number of whale watching companies in mainland Portugal, although there are few studies regarding the abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the area (Castro, 2010).

Due to the profitability of the activity in the area, more boats and companies are expected in the upcoming years. Therefore, there is an urgent need to evaluate the situation, conduct studies, investigate the natural and anthropogenic threats and reinforce the legislation and management of the whale-watching activities in the south of Portugal.

References:

Hoyt, E. 2001. Whale Watching 2001: Worldwide Tourism Numbers, Expenditures and Expanding Socioeconomic Benefits. Yarmouth Port, MA: International Fund for Animal Welfare.

Castro, J. 2010. Characterization of cetaceans in the south coast of Portugal between Lagos and Cape São Vicente. Master thesis, Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon.

Acknowledgments:

These results could not have been possible without the collaboration of the whale-watching companies "Dream Wave", "Dolphins Driven", "Black Runner" and "Cape Cruiser".