

Project Update: March 2004

The last two months have been very good, except for some problems with our equipment (boat and engine). We have given informal talks to tourists and public in general. In March we will be able to begin workshops and talks at local schools, when children return from their vacation.

From our studies, many dolphins have been re-sighted from last year's field work. Most of these dolphins have been seen in the same areas as last year. This tells us a lot about residence and site fidelity, which is at the same time a very significant sign that the areas are of great importance for dolphins. Habitat selection does not seem to have changed, Peale's and Chilean dolphins use areas close to rivers and they segregate clearly, not mixing at all. Salmon farms are common in all areas and boat traffic seems to have increased in one of our study areas (Reñihue fjord). Even though Chilean dolphins were seen often in this last fjord during beginning of January, dolphins have disappeared during the last weeks of February, which does not represent the pattern found last season.

We are trying to find out whether this is a consequence of some anthropogenic factor or a natural pattern due to a more widely habitat utilization. We have had access to technical reports made in these areas, and unfortunately there is a serious impact from aquaculture pollution. This might be affecting considerably dolphin food (fish and cephalopods) and then we are afraid that dolphins might be moving away to other new areas. We expect to do fieldwork until the end of April, and workshops and talks (Environmental education) will be carried out until June or July.