

Project Update: August 2018

Skin samples from bottlenose dolphins in the archipelago of Bocas del Toro and neighbouring coastal areas have been collected to assess the isotopic niche width for each location. Bottlenose dolphins in Bocas del Toro showed a broader isotopic carbon range than dolphins from other areas. This indicates that dolphins in the archipelago have several carbon sources, but only coastal prey, in contrast to dolphins from other areas that appear to feed on pelagic prey. Regarding nitrogen isotope, dolphins in Bocas del Toro showed lower values, which indicate that they feed on prey in lower trophic levels. Thus, the archipelago offers to dolphins several potential resources, and this explain why these dolphins remain in the area despite the intensity of interactions with dolphin-watching boats. However, isotopic differences between the areas suggest only coastal habits for dolphins in Bocas del Toro, confirming previous genetic findings. Mercury analyses as ecological tracer are currently underway to confirm this hypothesis.



Bottlenose dolphin in Bocas del Toro. © Dalia C. Barragán-Barrera



Preparing PAXARMS system to take skin samples from dolphins. © Chelina Batista



Boat approaching to dolphins. © Betzi Pérez



Boat doing a good approach to watch dolphins. © Betzi Pérez.