

Project Update: January 2009

From July 2008 to January 2009 we did a further 37 field boat trips including all the locations we are studying. Except from the Guarairas Lagoon, dolphins were seen in all boat trips. The analysis of photo-identification data from July 2008 to January 2009 has not been completed yet. However, previous analysis indicates that at least part of the dolphin population is resident, one using the area between Pipa and Tabatinga and another inhabiting Baía Formosa. All areas are critical habitats for the dolphins as they seem to use the areas on a daily basis to perform vital activities such as feeding, socializing and care for the young. When in Guarairas Lagoon dolphins forage most of the time. Occurrence of dolphins inside the lagoon might be related to the tidal state and movement of prey in this estuarine ecosystem.

January and February 2009 is the high season of tourism in Pipa, and besides the field work, we have been dedicated to environmental information activities. Our project receives Lattitude volunteers (British and Australian students in their gap period) that come to the Santuário Ecológico de Pipa, as well as biology student volunteers that are helping with all activities including presentations in two tourism vessels at Pipa beach. Our efforts are to warn people about the Tibau do Sul Wildlife Coastal Reserve, the rules of conduct inside the reserve and about the biology of dolphins. Also partially sponsored by a cottage in Pipa we built post signs warning about the reserve and the presence of dolphins. Both a Portuguese and an English version was done and put at places visited by tourists on the two beaches frequently used by dolphins (Curral and Madeiro). Also in these months we continued a dolphin monitoring work started by a colleague in Pipa beach, with the help of volunteers. From a lookout we are monitoring the number and behaviour of dolphins and quantifying the presence of tourism boat and its impact on dolphin behaviour. We have seen that the tourism boats are not respecting the rules proposed for the reserve. This lead us to write a small article in the local free informative of Pipa.

We are also planning to start a partnership with the recently elected mayor of Tibau do Sul to organize the tourism within the reserve, including the payment of royalties from the boat tour owners to raise funds for the reserve and the application of fine for disrespecting the rules of conduct inside it.

We are also starting to approach the fishing community by conducting a partial study of the artisanal fishing activity in all areas we are studying. This has been done with the provision of questionnaires to the local fisherman, including questions about type and amount of fish caught, time of day and year for fishing, type of artifact used, location, and interactions with or observations of marine mammals.

All activities will conclude by March 15th 2009. By this time we will start to analyse data, including the movement, residence and population size investigation of dolphins. Also by March we expect to make a film describing the daily routine of fishermen.