

Project Update: June 2008

We already analyzed the first 5 weeks of work, (10th March to 17th May), composed of 4 field trips to each of our study areas:

So far our catalogue constitutes of 69 well marked animals. Animals were seen in all field trips to Tabatinga, Pipa and Baia Formosa, but at Guarairas Lagoon dolphins were seen on two of the four visits. A total of 26 different animals were sighted in Tabatinga, 29 in Pipa, 3 at the Lagoon and 24 in Baia Formosa. From the total, 52% of animals were seen just once while the rest were seen in more than one occasion. Interchange between areas occurred, mostly between Tabatinga and Pipa (9 animals out of the total of each area). Two of the three animals sighted at Guarairas Lagoon were also seen at Pipa. Only one of the 29 animals sighted at Baia Formosa was also seen in Pipa and there were no matches between Tabatinga and Baia Formosa. All others resights were for animals in the same area. Movements between Tabatinga, Pipa and Guarairas Lagoon seem to be more frequent than from these areas to Baia Formosa. Tabatinga, Guarairas Lagoon and Pipa form an important habitat for the population. This is a 20km shore extension and dolphins seem to be constant moving trough, as the same dolphins have been seen in subsequent days over the region in different areas. Guarairas Lagoon dolphins were seen exclusively in fishing behavior making it an important feeding area. Not less important is Baia Formosa, although there was not much movement from this area to the others, a similar number of dolphins has been catalogued.

The possible treats to this dolphin population that we identified are:

Artisanal fishing activity in both Tabatinga and Baia Formosa as nets were frequently seen on areas used by dolphins. In Baia Formosa even illegal trawl fishing was seen. We do not know if there is any interaction of these activities with dolphins, such as entanglements and competition for the same target species. Pipa has much less fishing activity but a constant movement of tourist boat tour to watch dolphins and, in spite of the great potential to generate conservation and public awareness that this activity possess, without control and limits it can cause behavioral disturbances which may be equivalent to habitat loss and degradation. Guarairas Lagon has a subsistence fishing activity without use of nets but habitat degradation such as depletion of mangroves, shrimp farms and plans for hotels enterprises are potential treatable for the area.

In Tabatinga a friendship with the small fishing colony has been established, as they help us getting aboard our boat when the researcher meets the boat on site. It is important as we want to gather information about their activities and they knowledge. In Baia Formosa there was not much contact with the fisherman community yet but they are aware of our presence as they see our boat. A meeting to explain our research can be the first approach to this community.

We also want to hold a meeting with the boat tour operators in Pipa to share our results and emphasized the importance of regulate the dolphin watch activity. In 2006, a municipal protect area was created in Pipa (Faunal Reserve of Tibau do Sul) which helped to regulate the

movements of boats inside the bays used by dolphins. This can be the first step to contribute with the sustainable usage of the area. Showing the movements of dolphins can be the basis of a proposal to expand the protected area and regulated other activities potential hazardous for the coastal ecosystem.

