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DIETS OF SMALL CETACEANS STRANDED ON THE GALICIAN COAST (NW SPAIN)

by

M.B. Santos [1,2], G.J. Pierce [2], A. F. Gonzalez [1], A. Lopez [3], & A. Guerra [1]

[1] Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas (CSIC), Eduardo Cabello 6, 36208, Vigo, Spain
[2] University of Aberdeen, Department of Zoology, Tillydrone Avenue, Aberdeen AB92TN, UK
[3] C.E.M.M.A. Anxeriz 19, 5°D, 15985 Milladoiro, Ames, La Coruña, Spain

ABSTRACT

Stomach contents of 65 small cetaceans stranded on the Galician coast (NW Spain) from April 1993 to November 1994 were analysed. The species were: 41 common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), 7 long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melaena*), 5 bottlenosed dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), 5 Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), 4 harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) and 3 striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*). Additionally, one minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) stomach was also examined.

Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*) and scad (*Trachurus trachurus*) were the main food items in common dolphin stomachs. The harbour porpoise ate mainly sandeels (Ammodytidae) and *Trisopterus* spp., but also cephalopods such as cuttlefish (*Sepia* sp.). The striped dolphin had eaten mainly scad (*Trachurus trachurus*) and the sand-smelts (*Atherina* sp.). The bottle-nose dolphin stomach examined contained mainly hake (*Merluccius merluccius*), blue whiting and *Trisopterus* spp. Of the remaining cetaceans, the Risso's dolphin and the long-finned pilot whale had eaten only cephalopods, mainly the octopus, *Eledone cirrhosa* and *Octopus vulgaris*. Finally the single minke whale stomach examined contained only mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) bones and sandeel otoliths.

Most of the cetacean species studied had been feeding in coastal waters. For example many of the common dolphins, normally thought of as living in offshore waters had been feeding on gobies which are inshore fish. The striped dolphin was the only species taking oceanic squids.

Diets were broadly similar to those found in Scottish samples collected during the same period although certain species e.g. sand-smelt (*Atherina* sp.) and sardines (*Sardina pilchardus*) were not found in Scottish samples. These results are consistent with the opportunistic feeding suggested for these species.

Many species eaten are of importance to human fisheries but there are currently insufficient data to adequately quantify possible impacts on fisheries.