

Season Report 2025

January - October

TERRA AZUL Azores Whale Watching
Connecting People with Nature

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Tours & Statistics
3. Wildlife observations
4. Social responsibility
 - 4.1 Education Initiatives
 - 4.2 Research and Innovation
 - 4.3 Media and Educational Materials
 - 4.4 Sustainability
 - 4.5 Awards
5. Our 2025 team

1. Introduction

Discover the wild beauty of the Azores with Terra Azul

On the green shores of São Miguel Island in the heart of the Azores, TERRA AZUL invites you to listen to the whispers of the Atlantic and witness the magic of the sea.

For more than two decades, we have guided travelers in search of wonders and sharing amazing moments. Our passion lies in creating authentic encounters between people and nature along with experiences that educate, inspire, and awaken a sense of belonging to this extraordinary planet.

Each tour is a journey of discovery: from whale watching over volcanic cliffs to exploring the timeless beauty of the Princess Ring Islet. Here, volcanic forces meet the ocean's, hot springs breathe warmth into the earth, and every horizon reminds us of nature's quiet power.

With respect, science, and love for the sea, we continue our mission: to offer meaningful adventures that leave a light footprint but a lasting memory.



2. Tours & Statistics

Our Year in Summary

During the year of 2025, we spent **253 days at sea** - covering **38.766,5 nautical miles**. We went out at sea 1827 times, for a total of more than 3.900 hours. Each of these days presented a unique opportunity to bring people closer to the wonders of nature. In this way, we shared our passion and knowledge with visitors from a very wide range of different nationalities!



Whale watching

Most of our tours were destined for whale and dolphin watching. We successfully accomplished **1.177 tours**, with a total of 3.156 hours spent observing these magnificent cetaceans. On average we spent 2 hours and 45 minutes per tour, driving for an average of 29,68 miles and spotting 2-3 cetacean species per time, with a maximum of **7 species** during our most biodiverse tours! What species we see, where and when depends on a complex interplay between the animals' needs and a multitude of environmental, trophic and anthropogenic factors.



Swimming with Dolphins Experience

A total of 169 visitors got to enjoy wildlife and the Azorean blue through a Swim with Dolphins experience. Coming from our ethical and sustainability standpoints, we 1) focused our in-water encounters on **three species only**: common, bottlenose, and Atlantic spotted dolphins, 2) **limited the number** of Swim with Dolphins tours, and 3) made the effort to align our choices and approaches with the animals' **behavioural responses**. We laud all our swimmers for their empathy and their will to prioritise the dolphins' welfare.



Marine Birdwatching

Another 140 visitors joined our relatively new Marine Birdwatching tours. The Azores attracts an abundance of marine birds and is well-known for its large population of breeding **Cory's shearwaters** between spring and autumn!



Around the Islet Boat Tour

Furthermore, 4864 people joined us to see and learn about the beautiful Vila Franca do Campo submerged volcano's pass geology and living habitat. Our visitors learnt about its **geology, history** and as well as its seasonal highlights of **marine life**, not forgetting also the beautiful introduced and **native flora** species.



3. Wildlife Observation

Throughout our wildlife tours this year, we had the privilege of witnessing the remarkable richness of the ocean around us.

Geographical distribution

Our sightings are distributed along the southern coast of São Miguel (fig. 1), with a higher concentration in the area off Vila Franca do Campo, which is our departure point.



Fig. 1 - Sightings geographical distribution

The advantage of not operating from Ponta Delgada (the island’s capital) is reflected in our data: in **70%** of our trips, we are the **only vessel present**; in 22% of sightings, other whale-watching boats are nearby; and in 8%, we record the presence of other types of vessels, such as fishing or private boats.

This operational setting allows for quieter conditions and less disturbance during observations, contributing to higher-quality data collection and a more natural behavior of the species observed.



Characterization of the fauna observed

In **56% of our trips**, we observed **both dolphins and whales**, in 11% only whales, and in 34% only dolphins. A vivid reflection of the diversity and vitality of the Azorean marine ecosystems.



Among the species sighted, the **Common Dolphins** (*Delphinus delphis*) once again proved to be our most loyal companion, with 241 records. They were followed by the **Atlantic Spotted Dolphins** (*Stenella frontalis*), known for their lively energy, and, taking third place on the podium, the true star of the Azores: **Sperm Whale** (*Physeter macrocephalus*), a majestic emblem of the deep Atlantic.

In total, we **identified 19 species of cetaceans**, along with 5 species from other groups, including **turtles and fish** (fig. 2).

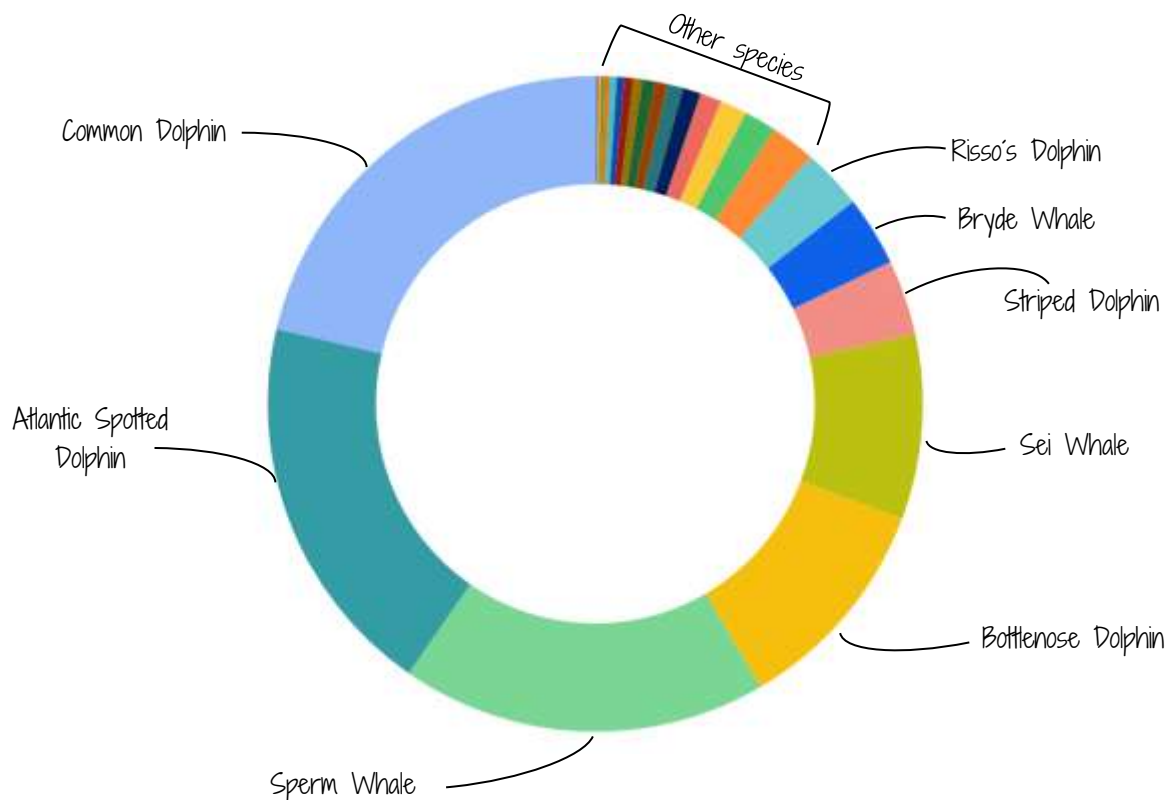


Fig. 2 - Cetacean Sightings by Species in 2025

Through the Seasons

In terms of seasonal distribution (fig. 3), **summer** stands out as the season of **greatest abundance** across all cetacean groups. A time when the ocean seems to come alive, offering countless memorable encounters (note that these data are influenced by sampling effort, as the summer months bring more tourist demand and better weather conditions). Nevertheless, the regular pattern observed throughout the year confirms that **dolphins** remain the **most frequently sighted group all year round**, delighting us with their constant presence and lively social behaviour.

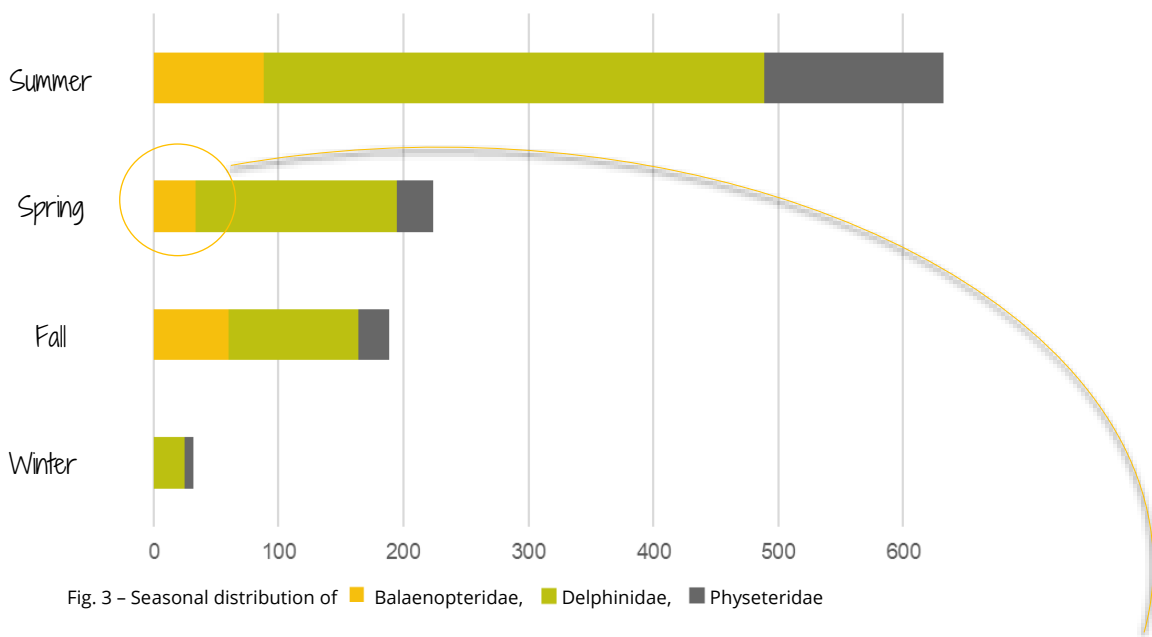


Fig. 3 - Seasonal distribution of Balaenopteridae, Delphinidae, Physeteridae

Spring is the best season for migratory baleen whales (fig. 4) around São Miguel, with the most frequently observed species being the ocean's true giant: the **Blue Whale** (*Balaenoptera musculus*). São

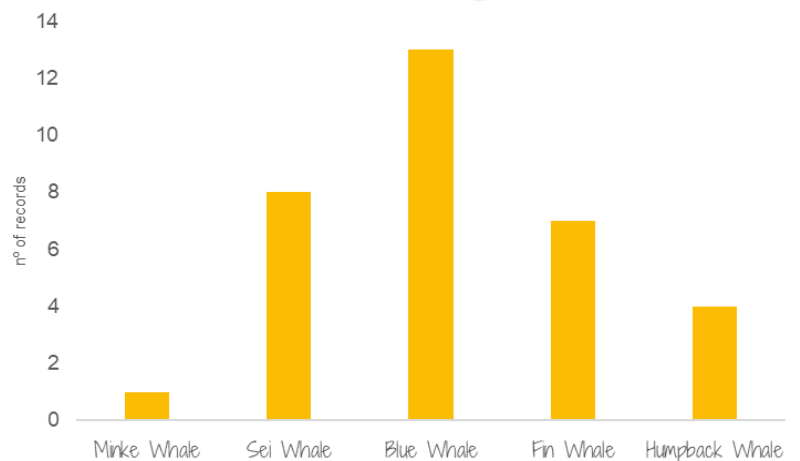


Fig. 4 - Baleen Whales records during Spring

Miguel lies along one of the migratory corridors used by these whales as they travel between tropical breeding grounds and high latitude feeding areas. Each sighting provides valuable data that helps us understand migration timing, population trends, and the ecological importance of the Azores as a temporary feeding and resting area for these endangered giants.



“An impossible feeling to explain”

This summer, we were fortunate to witness something truly special: **newborns sperm whales**. Seeing these calves, some still showing their pale, wrinkled skin from recent birth, gliding through the waters off the Azores. These magical encounters remind us of the vital role our archipelago plays as a key habitat for this majestic species.



Moments like these we will never forget

The Azores are one of the few places in the world where sperm whales can be seen year-round. Our deep oceanic waters provide ideal conditions for calving and nursing, making the region a critical hotspot for the survival and wellbeing of this vulnerable species.

Every sighting fuel our commitment to protect these gentle giants and to promote responsible whale watching practices and environmental education in harmony with nature.

This year has brought exceptional sightings of **Bryde's whales** (*Balaenoptera edeni*), with individuals observed for the first time as late as December. Rising ocean temperatures appear to be contributing to the increasingly frequent presence of these tropical animals in the archipelago. Thanks to our photo-identification efforts, we have documented up to **17 different individuals** during this season.

These results have been made possible through the work of our biologists on board, who photograph the dorsal fins and the head during our tours.



Other species sightings

Marine Birds

The highlight of the year was the photographic record of the very first sighting of a Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) on São Miguel captured by our team.

Thanks to our partnership with **Procellar-ID**, this season also brought a series of remarkable observations: alongside the familiar grace of Cory's Shearwaters, gulls, and Common Terns. We were gifted with encounters that remind us how the ocean continues to reveal its rare and beautiful

Table 1 – Seabirds records of Terra Azul team in 2025

Species	Nº of records
<i>Ardenna gravis</i>	21
<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	4
<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>	37
<i>Hydrobates leucorhous</i>	1
<i>Hydrobates sp/Oceanites sp</i>	1
<i>Pterodroma hasitata</i>	1
<i>Puffinus baroli</i>	1
<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	8
<i>Puffinus sp</i>	2
<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	2
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	2



secrets:

Sea turtles

This year we observed a noticeable decline in the number of sea turtle records. Only 26 individuals of the species *Caretta caretta* (Loggerhead Turtle) were sighted. Though fewer in number, each encounter carried a quiet significance as these animals can be used as ocean health indicators.



4. Social responsibility

Education Initiatives

In 2025, we continued to develop our educational activities, engaging local school groups through land-based and sea-based experiences focused on cetaceans and marine conservation. Throughout the year, we welcomed students from across the island, sharing the fascinating world of whales and dolphins and the importance of protecting the marine environment.

A total of **119 children** from Escola de Vila Franca do Campo took part in **whale watching trips**, and **32** additional children attended **educational sessions** at our base. Through interactive presentations and at-sea experiences, many experienced their first encounter with cetaceans in their natural habitat, sparking curiosity and a lasting connection to the ocean.

By connecting the next generation with the marine environment, we aim to foster awareness, respect, and stewardship for the ocean, reinforcing education as a key tool for a sustainable future.



“Teaching today, to preserve the ocean of tomorrow”

Research and Innovation

Collaboration with research projects remained an important component of our activities, supporting both guide training and data collection. Throughout the year, we continued our collaborations with **Elasmobase**, **Projeto Costa** and **SPEA**, while our PhD students completed their fieldwork and progressed to data analysis.

We hosted a workshop with Elasmobase focused on shark surface identification, as well as two **Procellar-ID** workshops that trained our guides in seabird identification, particularly for similar species. Following these sessions, seabird data collection was incorporated into our tours, with guides recording sightings of less common species.


As in previous years, we collaborated with SPEA during the **S.O.S. Cagarro** campaign in October and November, contributing to the conservation of Cory's shearwaters.

In parallel, we established two new research partnerships, further strengthening our commitment to scientific collaboration and innovation:

Procellar-ID,

Dedicated to the monitoring of seabirds.



 RDUK - CATT, where we deployed an F-POD – a device equipped with a microphone to record the echolocation sounds of odontocetes.



We are truly excited to be part of these collaborations, which strengthen our commitment to advancing and sharing marine science.

We are always open to collaborating on new projects. We welcome new partnerships and invite you to contact us for further information or joint initiatives!

Media and Educational Materials

In 2025, a **new media tour** was introduced in collaboration with our videographer. This private, full-day experience allowed extended time at

sea, enabling a slower tour pace, high-quality media production, and improved data collection during wildlife encounters.

Furthermore, two guides from Terra Azul attended the **36th European Cetacean Society Conference**, where they presented their projects and participated in several workshops, contributing to ongoing professional development and knowledge exchange.

Sustainability



We are proud to announce the arrival of our **first electric boat**, a decisive step in our mission to make maritime tourism in the Azores **more sustainable**. More **silent** and **emission-free**, this high-performance vessel will operate on coastal tours to the Islet of Vila Franca do Campo, offering visitors a comfortable, innovative experience in total harmony with nature.

The transition to **electric propulsion** represents much more than a technological change: it is a commitment to preserving marine life and reducing environmental impact. By eliminating the noise and pollution of

conventional engines, we help protect the fragile ecosystems that make our region so unique.

With a long-standing dedication to responsible whale watching, we believe this is the natural next step in our journey: **combining scientific knowledge, environmental education, and innovation** to provide authentic experiences that **respect the ocean**.

This electric boat symbolizes the future of tourism in the Azores a greener, quieter, and more sustainable future. We invite everyone to join us on this new journey, where each trip is also a contribution to the conservation of



our sea.

Awards

This year, our company has received several acknowledgements for its commitment to ensuring that our activities are as sustainable as possible and respectful of the environment and marine life.

For the third consecutive year, we have been awarded the **APEE** with the **Silver Award 2025** in recognition of our environmental practices, social responsibility, and sustainability.

This season we have successfully become the only company with the

Bandeira Azul awarded to all of our vessels. The **Bandeira Azul** is an internationally recognised symbol of quality that reflects our commitment to environmental sustainability, safety, and the protection of marine life.

Once again, this year our company is part of the **Cartilha de Sustentabilidade dos Açores**, committing through our actions to contribute to the sustainable development of the Azores.

5. Our 2025 team

This year, we improved Terra Azul's **Internship Programme**, strengthening its contribution to sustainable tourism, environmental education, and marine conservation. Our intern team was made up of six people from five countries—Spain, France, Austria, Italy, and Scotland—bringing together a rich mix of academic, professional, and cultural backgrounds.

The internship followed a learn-at-work approach, combining day-to-day experience with targeted workshops and hands-on learning alongside the rest of the team. We gradually gained confidence and independence in guiding roles, always supported by experienced and knowledgeable colleagues.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who joined us on this year's journey.

Each of you has contributed with passion, dedication, and curiosity, helping us grow and continue exploring the beauty and science of the ocean.



Together, we make a difference. Thank you very much!

Miguel Cravinho - Chief Executive Officer
(CEO)

António Brás - Chief Financial Officer
(CFO)

Filipe Sousa - Business Developer

VIGIAS (Lookouts)

Filipe Ferreira
Nicole Pereira
Miguel Barbosa
Carlos Realejo

OPERATIONS TEAM

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Jael Terroso
Sofia Sousa

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Julia Llinas
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Mayara Gomes
Monize Lários
Tamara Nikolaishvili
Rose Diebold
Flora Barth
Matteo Poggio
Clàudia Fernández
Chiara Massironi
Charlotte Conner

SKIPPER TEAM

Jorge Amaral
Daniel Paiva
Miguel Paiva

Photo credits

Whale watching boat during a tour – Rose Diebold

Common dolphin underwater – Rose Diebold

Common tern & Cory shearwater - Inês Mota

Tour around the islet - Inês Mota

Lookout house – Inês Mota

Sei whale with common dolphins – Clàudia Fernández

Sperm whales belly up – Tamara Nikolaishvili

Two sperm whales resting – Mayara Gomes

Blue whale body and guide debriefing – Tamara Nikolaishvili

Blue whale blow – Inês Mota

Bryde's whales – Clàudia Fernández

Sperm whale calve – Matteo Poggio

Pterodroma hasitata - Inês Mota

Logger head sea turtle – Mayara Gomes

Workshop with Procellar-ID – Inês Mota

Workshop with RDUK – different authors

School educational program – Tamara Nikolaishvili

Electric boat along Vila Franca do Campo- João Inocencio

Team photo - Tamara Nikolaishvili