

TERRA AZUL'S 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

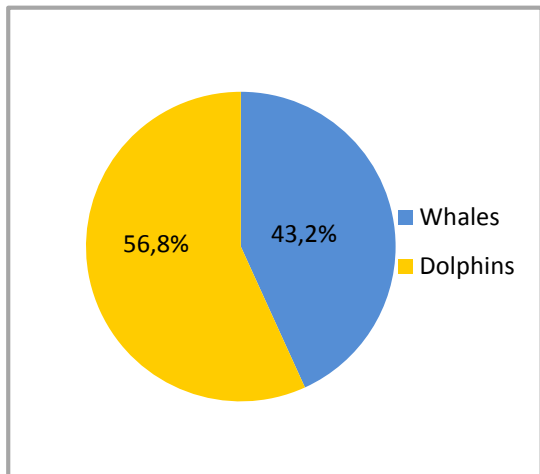
During the 2015 season TERRA AZUL successfully accomplished a total of 443 tours - 331 Whale Watching Tours; 89 Swimming with Dolphins; 23 Private Tours. On the following Report we will exclusively ponder Whale Watching Tours sightings. They were most significant for “our” MONICET PROJECT. This systematic project results from a long-term cooperation with of UNIVERSITY OF THE AZORES since 2009. Basically we are

responsible to collect daily basis on-the-ocean statistics and information which afterwards are scientifically validated by Marine Biology Department Researchers. Then this data is accessible on a Website Platform (<http://www.moniket.net>) that is available for general



Public and Scientists around the world with interest on cetacean studies. Our vision is to contribute for a better knowledge about Azorean Whales and Dolphins populations, distributions, feeding and nursery areas, etc. We strongly believe on benefits of Whale Watching for marine wildlife conservation. TERRA AZUL makes every tour a «research opportunity» because “no one will love something they don’t know”! We are committed to Ecotourism, Education and Conservation, TERRA AZUL’s key-values as a social responsible company.

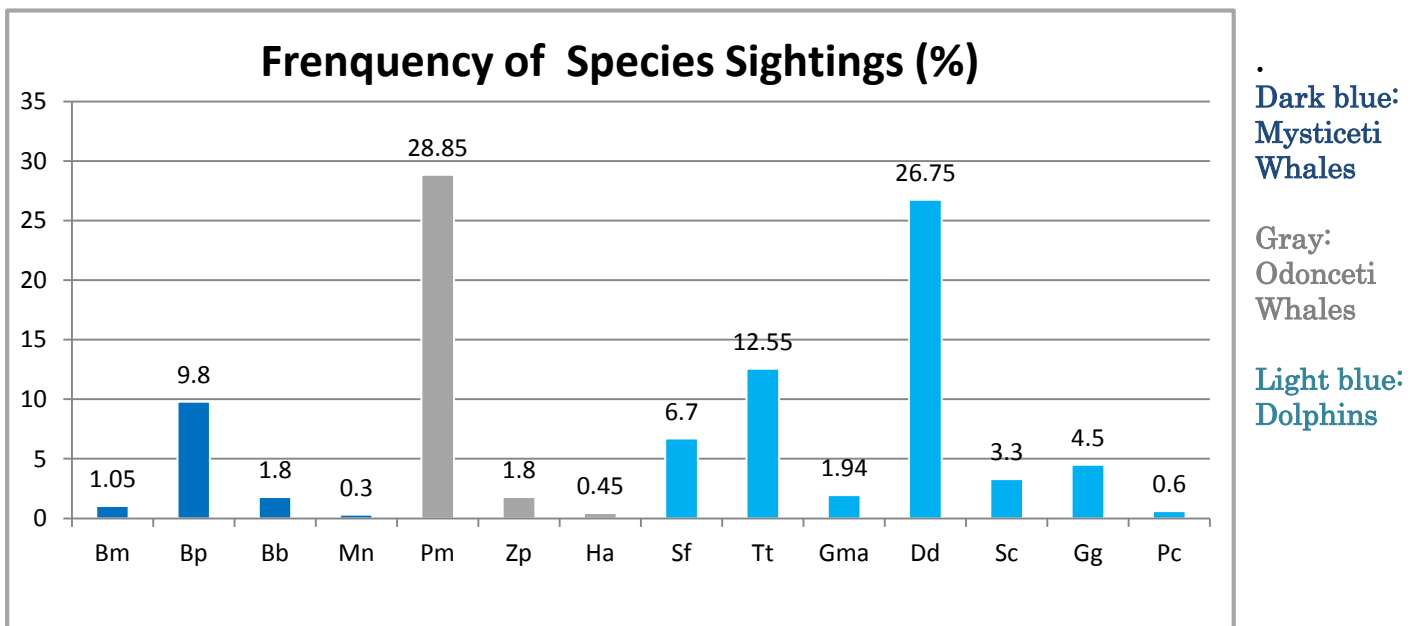




On this present season we were able to collect data on 219 tours out of 331 (on some days both boats were out on the ocean at the same time; to prevent collecting double data, only one boat and one guide were responsible for collecting it. Hence the 218 tours and not 331). A total of 669 sightings of which 289 (43,2%) were Whales and 380 (56,8%) were of Dolphins (included in this group are the Pilot Whales and the False Killer Whales that scientifically are dolphins as they belong to the *Delphinidae* Family in the *Odontoceti* Suborder).

Percentage of Whale and Dolphins Sightings

Onto the species sightings!



Bm – Blue Whale; **Bp** – Fin Whale; **Bb** – Sei Whale; **Mn** – Humpback Whale

Pm – Sperm Whale; **Zp** – Beaked Whales; **Ha** – Northern Bottlenose Whale

Sf – Spotted Dolphin; **Tt** – Bottlenose Dolphin; **Gma** – Short-Finned Pilot Whale; **Dd** – Common Dolphin; **Sc** – Striped Dolphin; **Gg** – Risso's Dolphin; **Pc** – False Killer Whale



A total of 14 species - out of 24 possible to observe in Azores - were recorded. The Top 5 ranking species were the Sperm Whale (28,85%), followed by the Common Dolphin (26,75%) and the Bottlenose Dolphin (12,55%), the Fin Whale (9,4%) and the Atlantic Spotted Dolphins (6,7%)

As typical, April and May were great for observations of Baleen Whales (*Mysticeti* Whales) as they pass thorough the Azores on their epic migratory journey further north, usually until mid-June. This year there was a small decrease of some Baleen Whales species sightings. Blue Whales decreased from 2,9% to 1,05%. Fin Whales kept pretty stable, from 9,4% to 9,8%.



Blue Whale



Fin Whale

And also this season Baleen Whales stayed for a bit longer than the usual.

For example, Fin Whales were sighted frequently until mid – August. And then sighted again for 2 times in October. Probably returning down from their migration from the North Atlantic,

We cannot forget that nature is in constant change, it is highly dynamic. Changes occur from year to year.



Sperm Whale sightings had a small increase. An increase from 24,2% to 28,8%(a total of 193 sightings between March and November).

This small increased might be due to an increase in squid, their main diet. Or maybe the Sperm Whales came more to South Coast making it possible for us to see them more frequently. This sighting numbers are considered normal, nothing out of the ordinary comparing to other years. In a great part of the sightings the Sperm Whales were observed socializing or resting.



Sperm Whale

Another species with a small decrease in sightings are the Common Dolphins and the Bottlenose Dolphins, falling from 29,8% to 26,7% and 14,4% to 12,5% respectively. Maybe to a lack of food in the areas where we can spot them (South Coast of São Miguel), or simply because on the days that they were present, we didn't have the best visibility or oceans conditions to find them and therefore the sightings did not happen. Atlantic Spotted Dolphins were sighted from May until end of October, maintaining the average of the frequency of sightings.



Common Dolphin



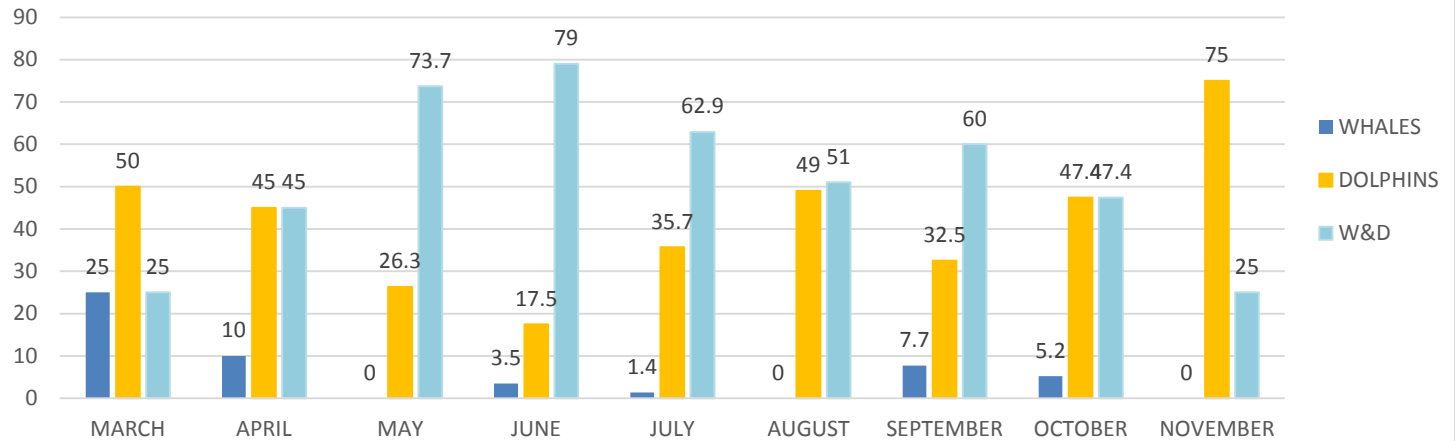
Bottlenose Dolphins



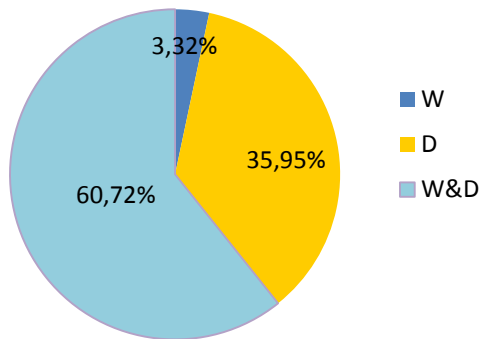
Spotted Dolphins



Percentage of Tour sightings per Month (%)



Overall Percentage of Tour Sightings(%)



On the above and left diagrams we present the ratio of Tours with either «only whales» (WHALES), «only dolphins» (DOLPHINS) or «both whales and dolphins» (W&D) from March to November.

We can realize that the months March and April were the ones with higher «only-Whales» Tours associated to the presence of the Baleen Whales at this time, as described before. From there the number of tours with «only Whales» starts to plummet, although there is an increase in September and October again. In these months we

had a few tours where only Sperm Whales or Fin Whales were sighted. From June on, the proportion of «only-Dolphins» tours starts to rise. Due to the fact that summer months is possible to see both resident and migratory species, this way increasing the dolphin's sightings.

In conclusion, this year there was a decrease of the presence of some Baleen Whales species (i.e. Blue Whale and Humpback Whale) the average was kept on some other species (i.e. Whale), and an increase of some others (i.e. Sei Whales).



Following comment is from MONICET researcher and Marine Biologist Marc Fernandez, regarding the Whale Watching 2015 season in the Azores Archipelago:

“Regarding the amount of species and animals sighted 2015 it has been a bit unusual regarding other years. In general we could say that baleen whales arrived “on-time”, or maybe a bit earlier. First Blue whales and Fin Whales were sighted in February, however they stayed for longer time in the entire archipelago. In 2014 this only happened in some specific sites, while this year we found a good rate of encounters even in the summer almost everywhere. The number of sightings was lower comparing to the last year, but still with reasonably good numbers.

On the other side Sperm whales sightings occurred a bit earlier this year. Some early animals were sighted during February and March. Sightings rate for Sperm whales were relatively normal, being sighted in 60% of the trips in the entire archipelago.

Looking at the most sighted dolphin’s species (Common dolphins, Atlantic spotted dolphins and Bottlenose dolphins), the sightings dynamic was a bit different. Especially Bottlenose dolphins were sighted more frequently during the first months of the year, and in São Miguel a very resident group was re-sighted many times over 3-4 months. The Atlantic spotted dolphins didn’t have a very high rating of sightings, following more or less the same pattern than the last year. In contrast to previous years where they used to be more sighted.”



ASSOCIATED SPECIES: Cory's Shearwaters were also sighted in most of our Tours. We usually see them feeding with the dolphins; in mobs relaxing or individually hovering the ocean water. About 60% of the world's population breeds and nests in the Azores. During the months of October and November, the young Cory's Shearwater start to leave the nests. During the night they can get confused with the street and cars lights, so sometimes they collide with them and fall.



Photo by Nuno Sá



Photo by Vitor Santos

There is a program called “SOS Cagarro” (Cagarro being the Portuguese name for Cory's Shearwater). This program involves the population of 9 islands of the Azores, by alerting and educating about the rescue of the young birds. When found on the floor, we pick them and put them in cardboard boxes. If they are not hurt, they are released the next day at the nearest beach. If they are hurt they are taken by the staff of the program for rehabilitation, to be tagged and, if possible, released later when healthy.

This year our crew found and released quite a few! We hope them all safe travels to the South for the winter and we hope to see them again someday!



Additionally to the MONICET PROJECT, we continued to lend a hand on other local scientific projects: a Boat Database Survey of the Tourism Activities Impacts managed by our former on-board Guide Arianna Cecchetti who is making a Postdoctoral at the University of Azores. Our help consisted on having a



marine biologist on board on Swimming with Dolphin Tours to collect information about how dolphins react to the human presence in their natural habitat. Interesting conclusions will develop in the near future regarding this issue. This info is crucial to adapt our expert behavior towards wildlife in order to reduce avoidable damaging impacts.

Also on board “TERRAZUL I” a GPS Device known as “Logger” was added again, to record geo-reference data for boat location during the Whale Watching Tours. The goal is to figure out which areas are the most explored by the Whale Watching activity, to possibly find how it affects the feeding, breeding and resting grounds. This will be important for future recommendations regarding marine wildlife protection regulation acts.

One of the things we are very concerned about is the impact our activity has in our marine mammal friend and of course on the whole ocean as well. Because of that, TERRAZUL is extremely committed to do everything we can to help this valuable Research assignments.

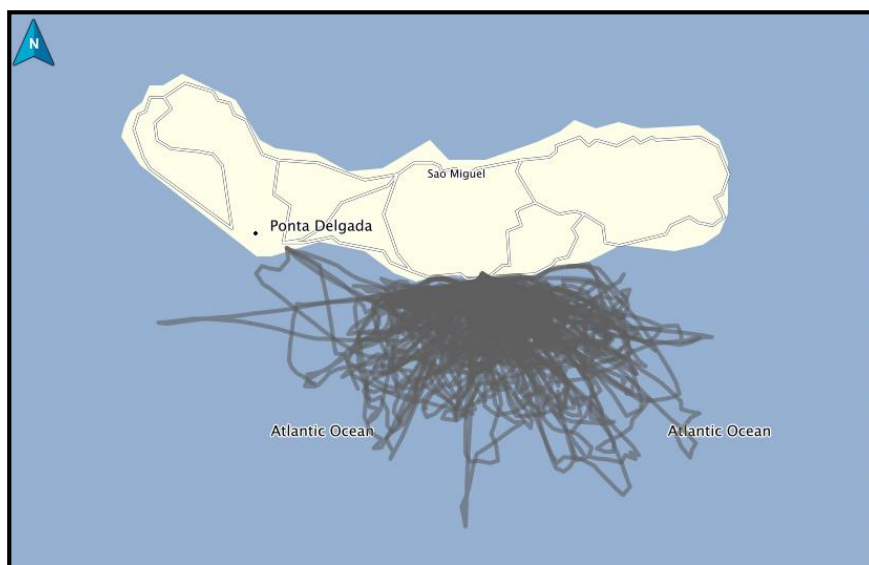


Following comment by Marine Biologist and former on-board guide Arinna Ceccheti on the use of the GPS logger in “TERRAZUL I”:

“In 2015 Terra Azul agreed once again to collaborate within a University project aiming at exploring the boat traffic off the south coast of São Miguel. For this purpose a GPS logger was placed on the largest boat of Terra Azul used for daily operations.

During the first season, in 2014, the device was tested so that in 2015 it was possible to collect a substantial amount of data throughout the period May-October.

Tracks extend within the area between Ribeira Quente and Ponta Delgada with the farthest points in Faial da Terra to the east and Relva to the west. However, the majority of tracks were recorded within 6.5 miles in a buffer area around the departure point in Vila Franca do Campo. Clearly boats tracks reflect the encounters and position of the animals. Although boats were recorded as far as 17 miles off the coast to encounter animals, the tracks show that it is not necessary to reach such distances as whales and dolphins can occur much closer.”





This season, we were part of an educational project with a group of Students from the University of Central Lancashire (<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/>) together with Archipelago Choice (<http://www.azoreschoice.com>), our longtime partners.

A group of 8 students, came to the Azores to learn about Whales and Dolphins, Azorean Whaling History and about Azorean History and Geography, with the goal to write a children's book. For this purpose we provided them with 4 Whale Watching tours

and a session about Azorean Whaling History with Miguel Cravinho at our base. The book with the title of "Whales beneath the Waves" will be published next year! We can't wait to read it!

In September, a lady named Gwenn Goormans joined us from Belgium. Gwenn is a Marine Biologist but never had actually seen a dolphin or whale before, which was one of her life dreams, but never became possible. Until this year!

Her colleagues from work, booked her a special week with us with filled with Whale Watching and Swimming with Dolphins tours! Also a

Biology and Research session with our MONICET collaborators and researchers Arianna Cechetti and Marc Fernandez at the University of Azores and an Azorean Whaling History session with Miguel Cravinho.

Take a look at her interview about her experience on our blog "Expedition Logbook" (<http://www.azoreswhalewatch.com/terra-azul-azores/gwenn-goormans/>).



We hope to see you again soon Gwenn for more adventure with the Cetaceans of Azores!



Our volunteer presentations at the hotels that we have a partnership with - [Caloura Hotel](#) Resort , [Bahia Palace Hotel](#) and the [Terra Nostra Garden Hotel](#) - continued this season. Also we started a new partnership and presentation at the brand new [Furnas Boutique Hotel](#).

The goal of these weekly presentations is to reach out to people and possible clients about the Whale Watching world. These presentations are conducted by a guide/ naturalist, that will accompany our clients on the tours. We believe that forming a bond even before the tour creates more personal, better, unique and unforgettable experiences as we always aim to accomplish.



This year, the “Senhora de Fátima” 1945 Traditional Whaling Boat was re-painted during the winter. She recovered the vibrant yellow and black colors from the original Whaling Company (each one had different colors to identify and distinguish them!)



We strongly believe these boats are *icons* of Azorean culture and heritage connecting people with the ocean. As contemporary memories of an old-style activity and virtuous remains of traditional knowledge and creativeness of local boat builders and whalers.

Nowadays the whaling boat “Senhora de Fátima” spreads this remarkable lesson to the World: it is possible to continue to “use whales” without killing them! This boat, as a symbol of Azorean Identity endorses a link “from Whaling to Whale Watching”.

Tourists and locals enjoy the pleasures of sailing a traditional boat while they learn about whaling history and traditions. (www.azoreswhalewatch.com/terra-azul-azores/construction-of-azorean-whaling-boat-senhora-de-fatima/)

This social responsibility project makes TERRA AZUL a unique company in Azores... and of course very proud as eco & culture supporters!

The “Associação de Classe Bote Baleeiro Açoriano” was funded. Its purpose is to provide unique experiences in sailing a Whaling Boat for sports and leisure, sailing training for adults and as a living history museum.



This year we have a brand new and modern website (www.azoreswhalewatch.com). We are very excited about it!!



The goal of our new website is to improve communication with possible Whale Watchers, by providing useful information, to explain our services (providing exceptional experiences in the ocean!) and of course to share all of our news and media. For this we use our Blog – Expeditions Logbook (www.azoreswhalewatch.com/expeditions/).

In there you can find useful information about the species and amazing photos and videos of our tours. Pretty much everything we are up to!

And let's not forget our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/azoreswhalewatch). Where all of the posts from the Expedition Logbook are directly linked to. Making them easier and faster to access to!

Aww the wonders of the Internet!

We would like to share with you how proud we are on our Trip Advisor 2015 Certificate of Excellence award. As a team we are very gratified to provide an excellent service to each and every Whale Watcher. TERRA AZUL always has and will, aim to keep high quality service standards.

(www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g189134-d1930043-Reviews-Terra_Azul_Azores_Whale_Watching-Sao_Miguel_Azores.html)



This year new crew members joined Terra Azul's Team! New General Manager Ana Rita and Sales Promoter Arno Snellenberg. Who did a great work by giving many clients the opportunity to join our educational tours.

After a successful season Arno went to South Africa to start a new life and all TA Team wishes him the best wishes and the best of luck on his new adventures! ☺

During the winter, our vessels TERRAZUL I and TERRAZUL II and all the equipment we need to make our tours possible will go under maintenance to make our tours possible next season.

In 2016, TERRA AZUL, will come back stronger and readier than ever to continue to share our passion and provide the best experiences to our clients on the big blue with our friends the Whales and the Dolphins! ☺



And now on a farewell note we leave you. See you next year for another brilliant and filled with Cetaceans 2016 Season!!

We will close the office from 15 December to 29 February for staff vacation. Important issues shall be attended by Miguel Cravinho on b2b@azoreswhalewatch.com or by phone +351 917 282 921.

For more information about sightings and species occurrence please visit: www.monidet.net

And join us at:

www.azoreswhalewatch.com and www.facebook.com/azoreswhalewatch

