

## CETACEANS IN THE CENTRAL TYRRHENIAN SEA : THIRD (AND LAST?) YEAR OF SIGHTINGS : PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Sighting cruises in the Central Tyrrhenian Sea have been carried out on board ferries between the Sardinian coast and continental Italy for the third consecutive year (Marini *et al.*, 1992). 79 trips were carried out every month from October, 1991 to September, 1992.

The data collected widely confirm the sightings made in previous years (Fig. 1). Particularly interesting was the seasonal presence of the genus *Balaenoptera* (30 sightings during 1992; in most cases fin whales, *B. physalus*), with a peak in April-May and minimum numbers between November and December (Fig. 2). Considering the previous observations made in the western part of the Mediterranean basin by ourselves (Marini *et al.*, 1992) and other authors (for example Gannier & Gannier, 1989, 1990; Hashmi & Adloff, 1991, for surveys in the Gibraltar area) a tentative hypothesis relating to the relative abundance and seasonal distribution of *Balaenoptera* sp. can be summarised in Figure 3.

As in previous years, breachings of fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) were observed in January and August. Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) (6 sightings), bottle-nosed dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) (23 sightings) and Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) (four sightings) were confirmed as relatively common, while sightings of sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) (three) and common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) (two) remained rare. Long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) was not sighted this year. Striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) (108 sightings) was by far the most common species in the area throughout the year.

Since the sightings did not show substantial differences by comparison with those of previous years, the phase of data gathering is considered to be completed. However, it will be interesting to repeat sighting cruises after a number of years, in order to discover possible variations in the long term.

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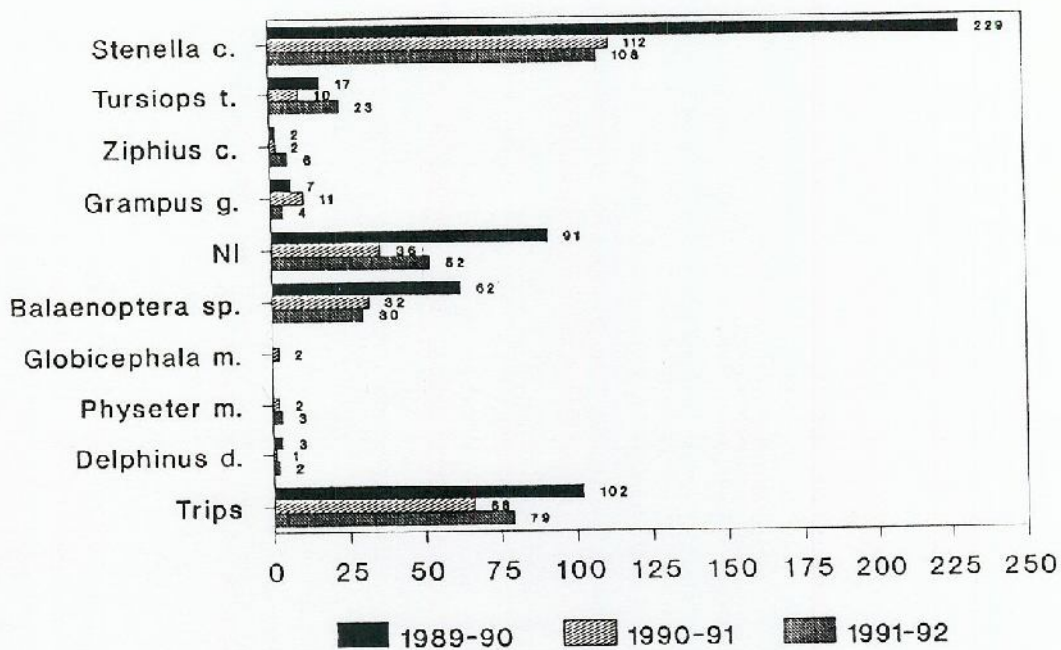


Fig. 1a Sightings by species

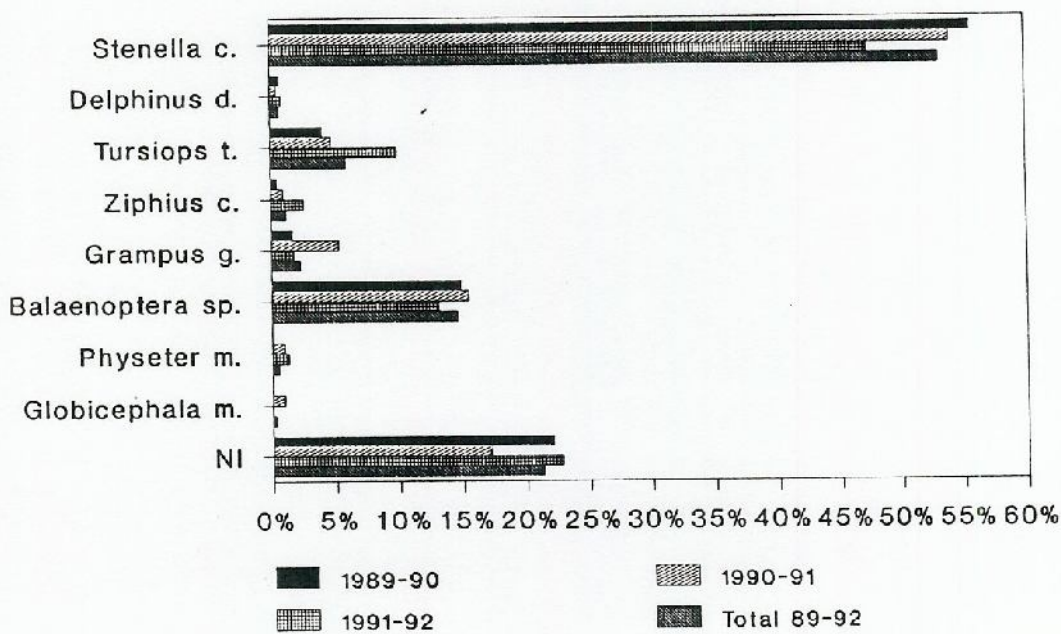


Fig. 1b Sightings by species (%)

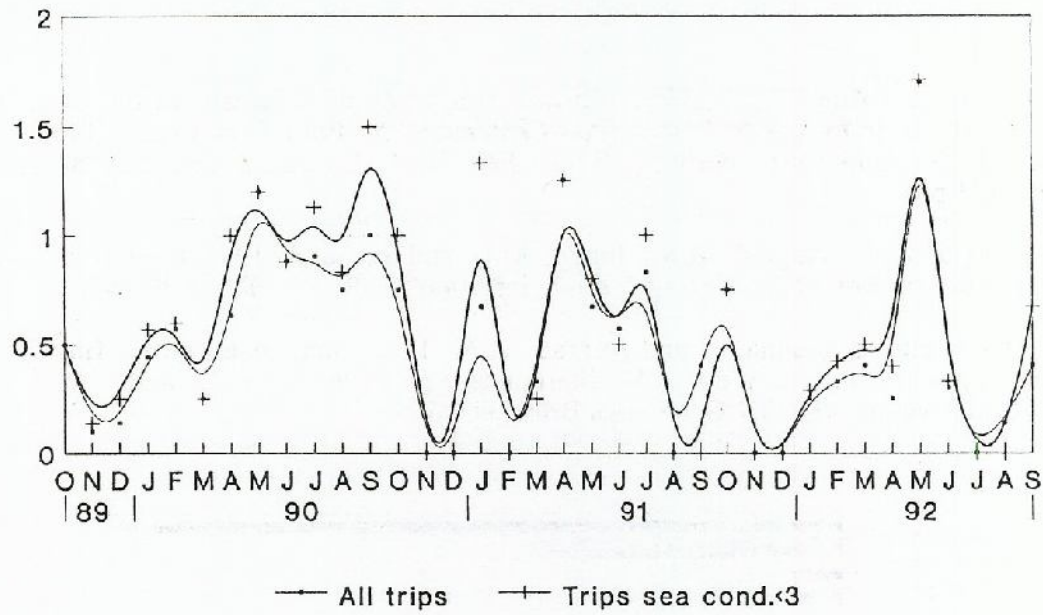


Fig. 2 *Balaenoptera* sp. sightings per trips

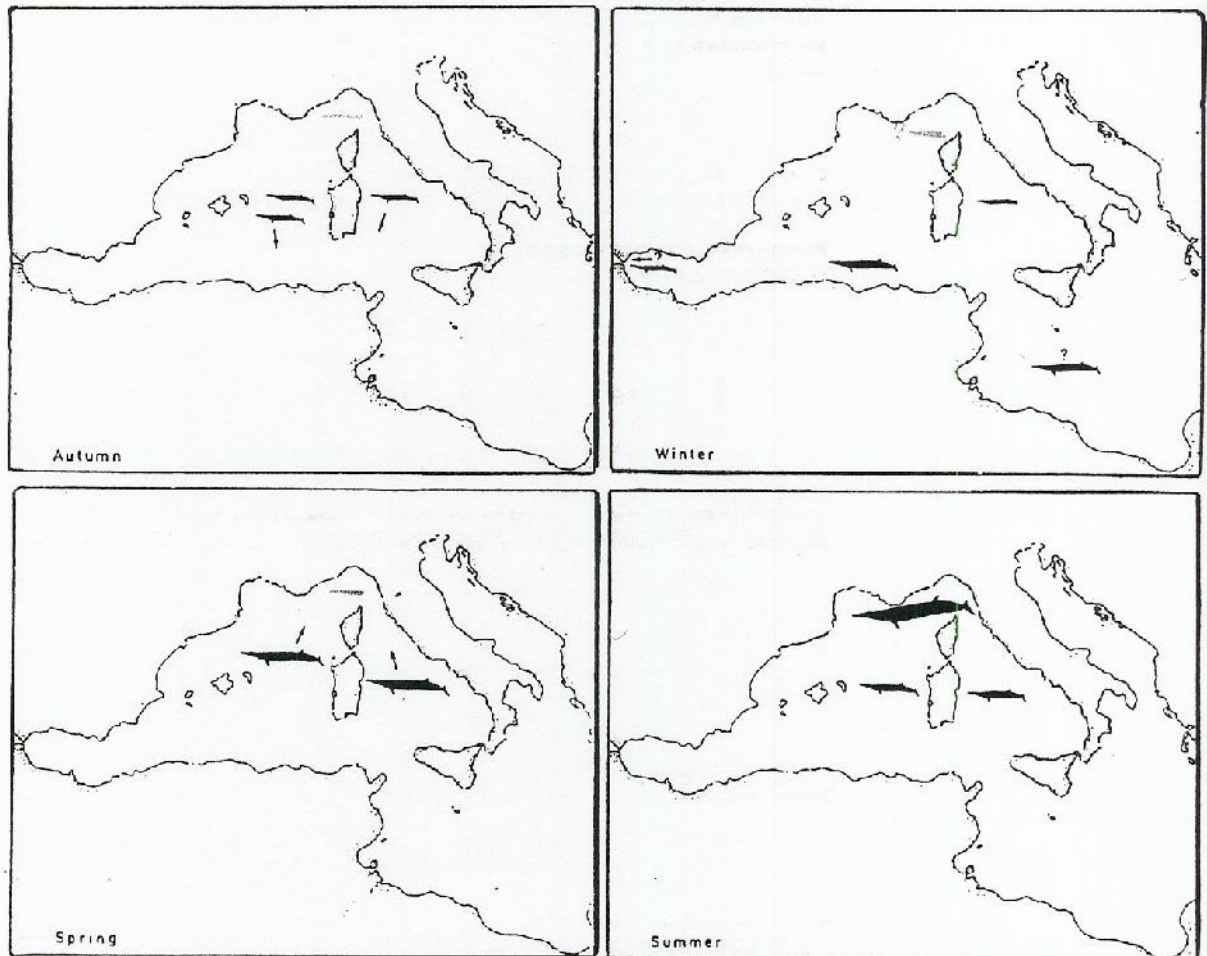
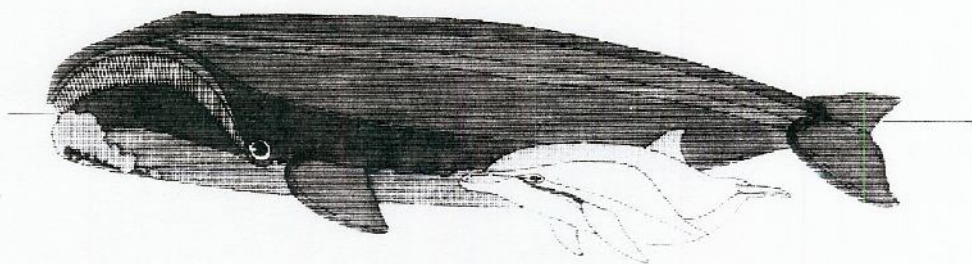


Fig. 3 Distribution of *Balaenoptera* sightings by season

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