THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE HARBOUR PORPOISES BORN IN WINTER

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INTRODUCTION

The porpoise recorded in Galicia (NW Spain) is the Afro-Iberian harbour porpoise, proposed as a new subspecies. One of the lesser-known aspects of the local population is the possibility of a seasonality of births. In **other harbour porpoise populations** throughout the world, births are concentrated from **May to September**.

MATHERIAL & METHODS

Between 1990 and 2022 only 6 fetuses have been recorded (largest = 89 cm). On the other hand, there is more data on newborns (smallest = 78 cm).

In order to try to delimit a birthing season, and considering the smallest calf and the largest fetus, the records of individuals already born with a **length between 78 cm and 95 cm** (n=19) were analyzed.

The birthing seasonality could also be inferred studying the **peak in testicular weight variation** in adult males. In the last 33 years we could only get this data for a reduced number of individuals (n=18). A gestation period of 11 months must be added to this peak to calculate the birthing season.

1. Hasselmeier *et al*. 2004. Stranding patterns of Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the North and Baltic Seas: when does the birth period occur? Journal of Cetacean Research and Management 6 (3): 259–263.

2. Lockyer 2003. Harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the North Atlantic: Biological parameters. NAMMCO Scientific Publications 5: 71–89.

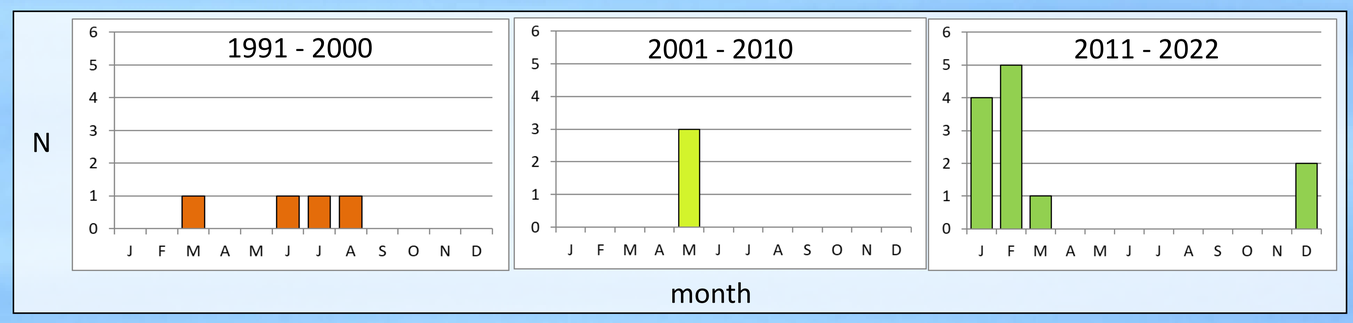
3. Mohl 1954. Investigations on reproduction and growth of the porpoise (*Phocaena phocaena* (L.)) from the Baltic. Vidensk. Medd. fra Den. Dan. Nat. Foren., 116 (1954), pp. 369-396.

4. Korosteleva *et al*. 2023. Problems of neonatal mortality of the Black Sea harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena relicta* Abel, 1905). In: Marine Mammals of the Holarctic. Collection of Scientific Papers After the 11th International Conference, online, 01-05 March 2021. Moscow, Russia.

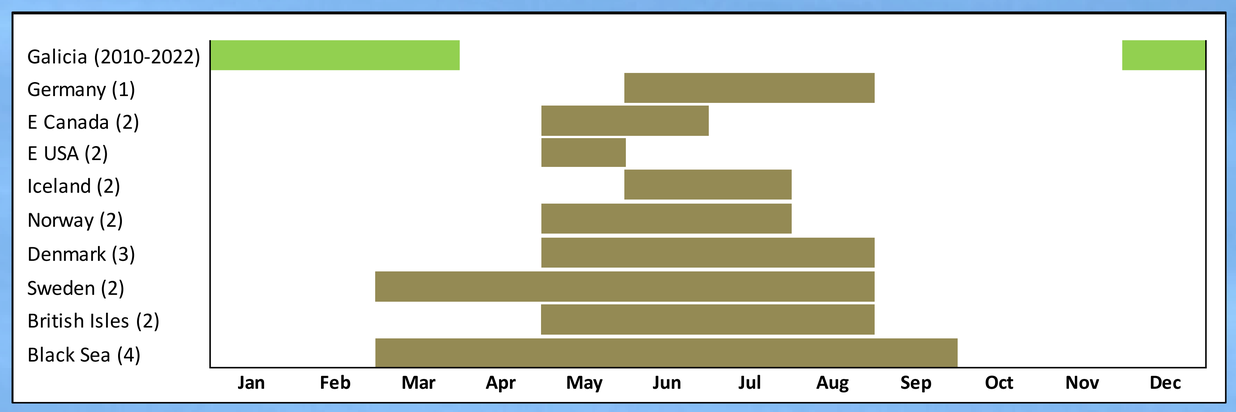
Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia
Financiado por la Unión Europea NextGenerationEU
XUNTA DE GALICIA

RESULTS

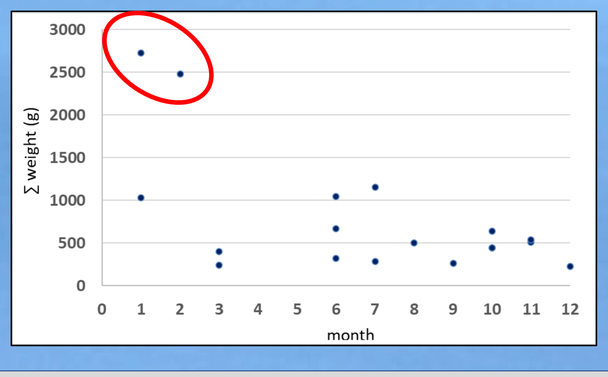
1. NEWBORNS DATA



Over the years, births trend to concentrate, with an evident seasonality. For the last 12 years: from December to March. The next figure shows the differences with other populations.



2. TESTICULAR WEIGHT IN ADULT MALES



Peak in January – February. Adding a 11-month gestation period, birthing season would be in December – January, what is consistent with newborns data.

CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ A **CALVING SEASONALITY** is observed analyzing the harbour porpoise strandings data from Galicia.
- ✓ Over time, it has moved towards the **WINTER MONTHS**.
- ✓ Peak in testicular weight of adult males **CONFIRMS** it.
- ✓ **VERY DIFFERENT** compared with other populations of the species throughout the world.