



# Presence of cetaceans in the newly Marine Protected Area in the Algarve, Portugal



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## Introduction

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are expanding globally to address the urgent need to protect ocean biodiversity. In line with the “30 by 30” target, aiming to protect 30% of marine areas by 2030, Portugal established a new MPA in 2024: the Marine Natural Park of the Algarve Reef – **Pedra do Valado**, located in the south of Portugal. MPAs such as this, play a key role in maintaining ecosystem integrity and supporting the conservation of highly mobile species such as cetaceans<sup>(1)</sup>.

## Methodology

Cetacean presence in the Pedra do Valado MPA was assessed using data collected over 15 years (2010–2024) from dedicated research surveys and platforms of opportunity (Fig.1).



Fig. 3 – Bottlenose dolphins (*T. truncatus*) in the Pedra do Valado MPA, South of Portugal.

## Results

A total of 818 sightings of cetaceans, corresponding to 7 different species were observed within the MPA (Fig. 2).

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) were the most sighted species (58%) (Fig. 3), followed by common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) (33%).

Other species such as harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*), Risso’s dolphins (*Grampus griseus*), and baleen whales (minke – *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, sei – *B. borealis*, and fin whales – *B. physalus*) were also occasionally sighted.

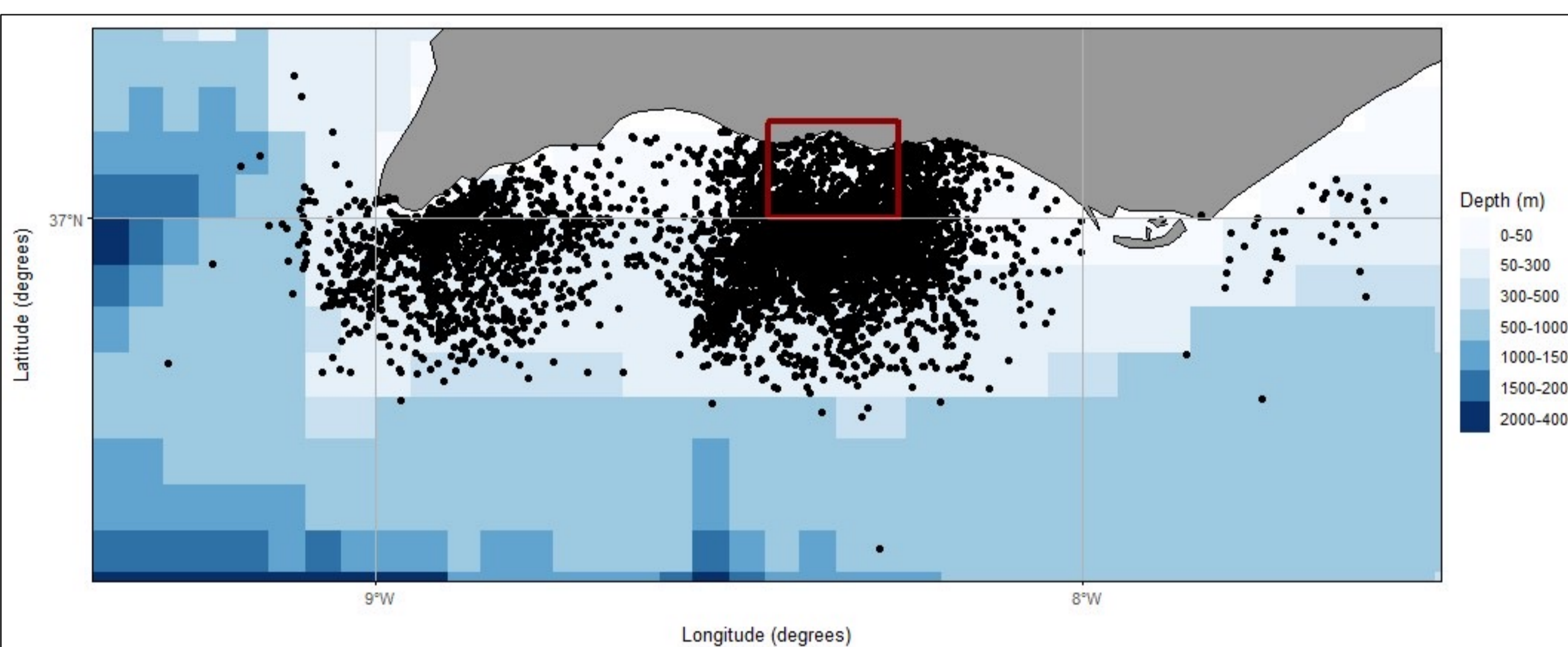


Fig. 1 - Sightings of cetaceans off the south of Portugal, 2010-2023. Pedra do Valado shown in the red box. Each sighting represents one group of 1 to 100s of animals.

## Discussion and Conclusion

These findings highlight the ecological value and cetacean richness of the region, supporting the designation of the Pedra do Valado MPA. Continued monitoring is essential to assess species use and evaluate MPA effectiveness through “before and after” comparisons. Ongoing efforts include transect surveys (distance sampling), with planned integration of unmanned aerial vehicles to provide long-term insights into occurrence, habitat use, and conservation outcomes.

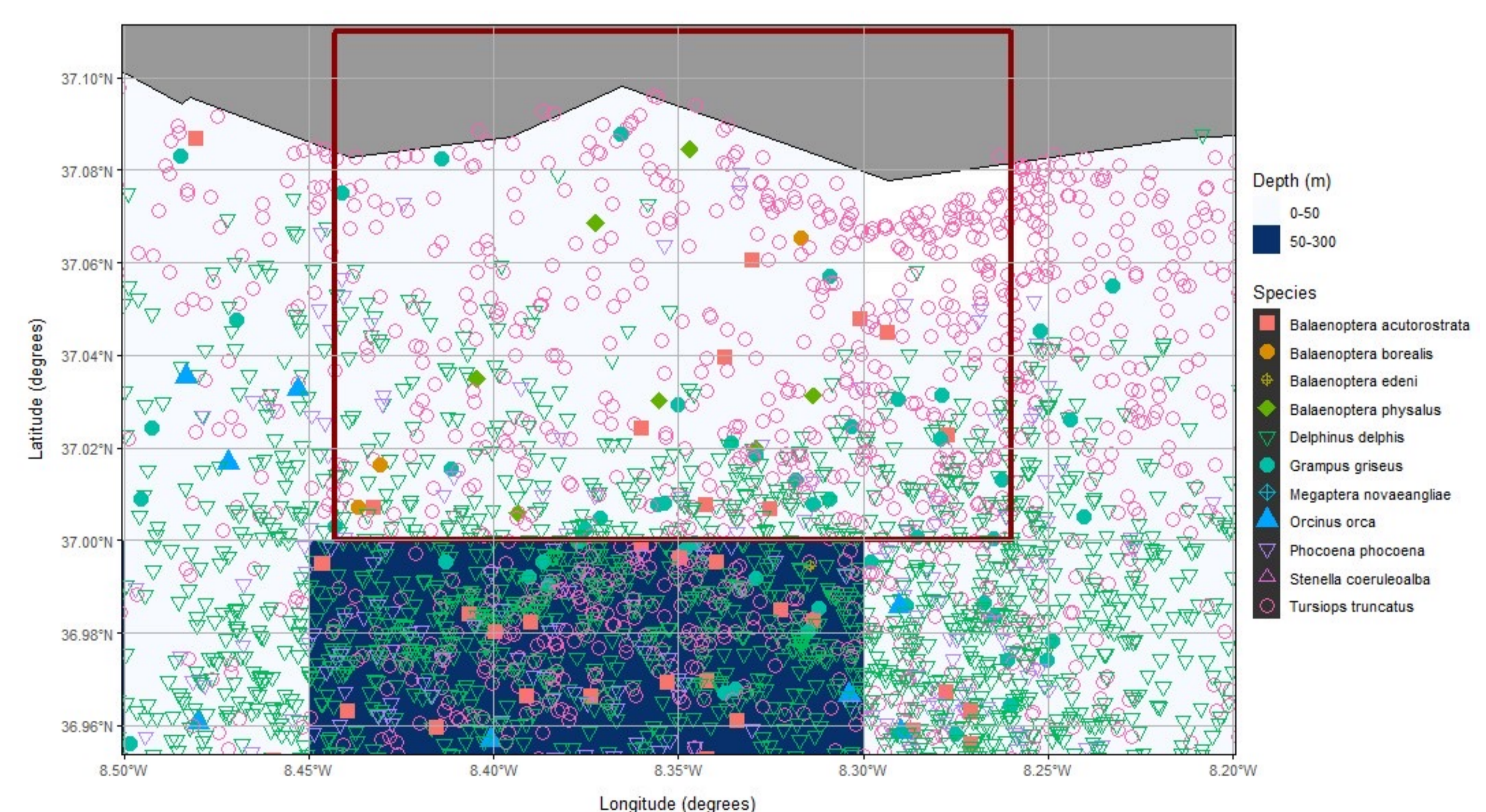


Fig. 2 - Sightings of cetaceans in Pedra do Valado, 2010-2023. Each sighting represents one group, ranging from 1 to 100s of animals.

More info here!



## References

(1) Grau Tomás E and García Sanabria J (2022) Comparative analysis of marine-protected area effectiveness in the protection of marine mammals: Lessons learned and recommendations. Front. Mar. Sci. 9:940803. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2022.940803

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