

PTES Update

The project “Evaluating the distribution and conservation status of a new coastal dolphin species, the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*) in Pemba Island, Tanzania” is being conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society. The study is now half-way through and has been highly successful, exceeding our best expectations.

The project is focussed on, the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin, which occurs only in the Western and Northern Indian Ocean. This species is extremely poorly known in the majority of its range, it occurs very close to shore which renders it particularly susceptible to the effects of human activities in the coastal zone including bycatch in fishing gear and hunting.

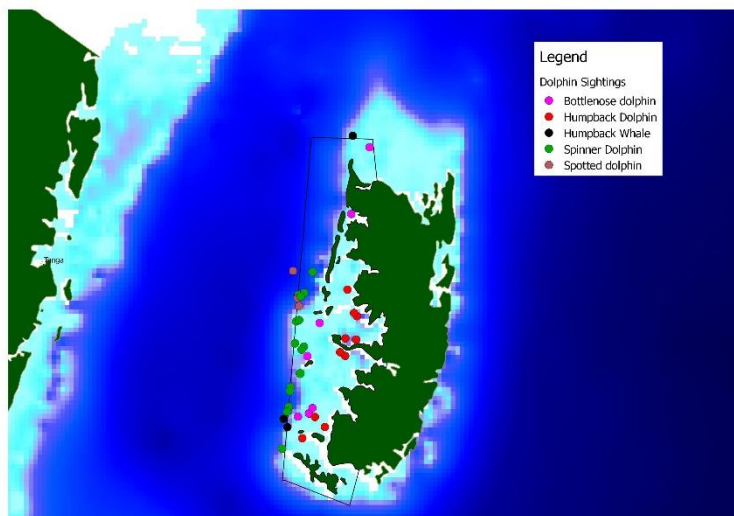
This project aims to confirm the presence of a potentially large and important humpback dolphin population located on the west coast of Pemba Island, Tanzania in the Pemba Channel Conservation Area. It is designed to describe and attempt to quantify the magnitude of cetacean bycatch and hunting, as well as examining the distribution, relative abundance and habitat preferences of the humpback dolphin population.

The first of two field expeditions was successfully conducted in October 2014. The survey team included members of the management of the Marine Park and rangers from Misali Island. The team and park staff received training prior to the start of the project in marine mammal biology and conservation and practical exercises on the use of GPS.





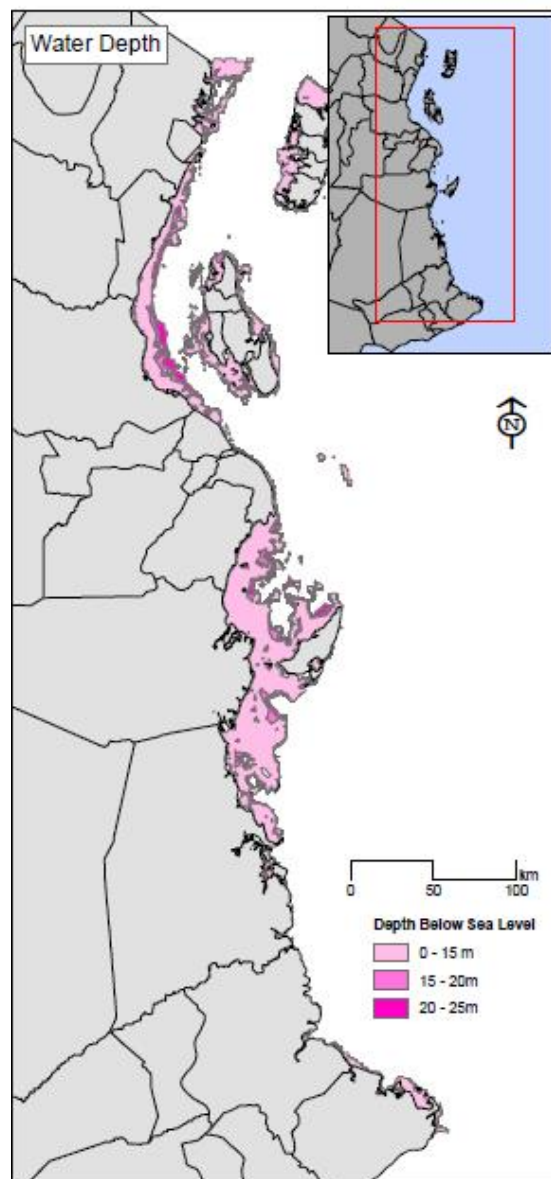
95 hours of surveying were conducted over 12 days and 547km covered. We recorded 39 sightings, of 5 cetacean species. The most exciting news was that we confirmed the presence of a significant population of humpback dolphins west of Pemba. We recorded 10 sightings most included 3 to 4 individuals but we also sighted a large active group just a few hundred meters from shore that we estimated as 10 animals. Other species that we encountered were spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*), Pan-tropical spotted dolphins (*Stenella attenuata*), Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*) and two mother-calf pairs of Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).



We obtained high quality photographs of the humpback dolphins we sighted in Pemba and the project research assistant, Magreth Kasuga, has been working to identify individuals based on unique scars and markings on their dorsal fins and backs. So far the photo-ID catalogue contains 27 unique individuals photographed on either the left or right side. Interestingly more than 40% of these had scars that clearly were inflicted by fishing nets. A second expedition is planned in October 2015.



We used the humpback dolphin habitat preferences identified in Pemba and from other studies on this species, and using GIS identified potential locations of Indian Ocean humpback dolphin occurrence along the little known, 800km long Tanzanian mainland coast. Key potential habitat is in



the Rufiji Delta and around Bagamoyo.

A team also conducted approximately 100 interview surveys with fishers and fish vendors throughout Pemba to gather information on cetacean and other endangered species bycatch. Fishers consistently reported that dugong no longer occur in Pemba. In some locations on the island dolphins that are accidentally captured are eaten, or the oil is used as boat preservative. These data are still being analysed.