INTRO – Knowledge about Mediterranean cetaceans mostly belongs to limited well-studied zones. Increasing effort is being deployed to predict ecological “scenarios” for the entire basin. Empirical validation of such predictions is still pending, along with increasing knowledge of poorly studied sea areas. In 2010 a new research project was set up in a slightly studied zone, the Balearic Sea, with the aim to provide new information. We present results concerning presence, sighting rates and seasonality of the cetacean community of this area.

RESULTS – 2800 km were surveyed with visual effort, whose 1500 belong to maritime campaigns. Distribution of sightings is shown in fig1. We detected eight species corresponding 55% to striped dolphins, 11% to fin whales, 8% to bottlenose dolphins, 4% to sperm whales, 3% both to Risso’s dolphins and Cuvier’s beaked whales, 1% both to short-beaked common dolphins and long-finned pilot whales, and 14% to non-identified cetaceans (N=95, fig 2). We precise that common dolphins and pilot whales were detected slightly out of the prospected area. The species richness map highlights that higher diversity zones lie in the northern part of the Balearic Sea (fig3). Sighting rates are shown in fig 4 and detailed in table 1. ANOVA and Tukey post-hoc test were performed to test the significance of differences in sighting rates: striped dolphins are significantly higher than all other species excepted fin whales. Conversely we found no significant difference among sighting rates of fin whale, bottlenose dolphin, Risso’s dolphin, Cuvier’s beaked whale and sperm whales \( F_{5,18} = 6.1654 \), all \( p < 0.05 \), fig5).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS – These results describe basic, but formerly unknown, parameters about cetacean populations in the area comprised between the Balearic Islands and the Barcelona province (NE Iberian Peninsula). These data point out the importance of this area for species usually considered as common or rare at the Mediterranean Sea scale. Further effort is clearly needed and currently being planned in order to get deeper insight and to contribute to the increasing collaborative effort in research and conservation actions at the Mediterranean level.

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REFERENCES