



2006: a record year for Southern right whale records off Brazil

Palazzo Jr., J.T.¹; Groch, Karina R.¹

(1) *Brazilian Right Whale Project, C.P. 201, Imbituba, SC, 88780-000, Brasil.*

pesquisa@baleiafranca.org.br

Southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) were historically distributed in Brazil from the northeastern to southern coastal areas, but intensive commercial whaling undertaken until 1973 almost extirpated the species from Brazilian waters. Aerial surveys off southern Brazil have been conducted by the Brazilian Right Whale Project since 1986, primarily for photo-identification of the remnant population. An increase in the population has been recorded since then, especially in the last five years. In 2006, four surveys were conducted, covering 320-400km of coast, totalizing 35.5 hours of flight. A total of 335 whales (162 sightings) were registered, of which 85 were calves and seven were juveniles (includes double counting). In the survey conducted in September, the peak whale abundance, 194 different individuals were sighted. This is a record number of whales ever recorded for the region, almost twice the previous highest number of 128 individuals in 2002. Groups consisted mostly of two whales (43.3%, n=39) and groups of up to eight whales were sighted. Pictures of most of the groups were taken during this season and are still under analysis. As in previous years, whales arrived in July/August, reaching peak in September, and declining in October/November. However, a prevalence of adults not accompanied by calves was observed in August and September, something not previously recorded in the region for the peak season. This outlines how important it is to develop and continue long-term monitoring programs for large whales, in order to accumulate data that can be adequately interpreted regarding population movements and dynamics over time and possible implications for conservation.