Relatively little is known about the marine mammal species around Kenya. The scarce knowledge on these species is based on data collected during aerial survey conducted between 1994 and 2001, and information from stranded animals. Since then, some of these species have been in constant decline in the Western Indian Ocean, facing real threats such as by-catch in fishing gears, loss of habitat, overfishing or whale/dolphin-watching activities.

For these reasons, there is an urgent need to gain a more comprehensive data set for these species. Introducing opportunistic sightings can be an economical resource as well as a vital contribution to achieving this larger data. Opportunistic sighting surveys can be defined as species data collection from non-scientific vessels and persons who regularly frequent the seas. This activity has been undertaken in many countries throughout the world where either limited scientific research has taken place and/or to bolster data collection from a wider, often multinational area.

This network aims to provide the first consistent data on occurrence and abundance of marine mammals along the Kenyan coast collected by sport fishing vessels, diving clubs and NGOs as a platform of opportunity. Also, this project will help to define areas of “High Importance” for marine mammals, which will improve our understanding of these species in this region and on a broader temporal scale. At the same time, this data is extremely important for the marine mammal conservation and management strategies in Kenya and it may be used as a baseline for further studies.

The Kenya Marine Mammal Network project proponent GVI (Global Vision International) is a UK based conservation organization who conducts research on behalf of local partners worldwide. In Kenya, GVI has been working alongside Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) since 2006, studying the marine mammal populations around Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area.

GVI are partnering with WMA (Watamu Marine Association) on the north coast who also works closely with KWS and who initiated a dolphin research project in 2010 in the Malindi/Watamu Marine Protected Area. WMA brings together a diverse membership of groups and organisations in Watamu to support projects that benefit the community, protect the marine environment and promote sustainable tourism.

KASA (Kenya Association of Sea Anglers) is the governing body for saltwater sports fishing in Kenya and a member of the International Game Fish Association (IGFA), the world's governing body for sport fishing. KASA has been identified as a key partner, working with skippers, anglers and crews of sport fishing boats to record sightings and collect data on marine mammals in our waters.

This network is also been supported by Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Marine Fisheries Research Institute.
RESULTS FROM
OCTOBER 2011 – MARCH 2012

The Kenya Marine Mammal Network collected data between October 2011 and March 2012 from Shimoni (South coast) to Lamu (North coast). In total, 157 sightings (Fig. 1) were reported from 23 collaborators (individuals or groups). The most sighted locations were: Kwale (96 sightings), Malindi (52), Kilifi (5), Lamu (2), Mombasa (1), Tana River (1).

The Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin was the species with more reports (Fig. 2). This species was sighted along the whole Kenyan coast, from Manda Bay (Lamu) to Shimoni (Kwale). Most of these encounters were close to shore showing the coastal preference of this species. It is probable that the offshore sightings belong to the common bottlenose dolphin species, which has a preference for deeper waters.

Spinners dolphins was reported on 23 occasions. Most of them by the deep sea fishermen from Shimoni and Watamu. The animals were mainly found on deep waters around the Pemba Channel and Watamu banks (Fig. 3).

Humpback dolphins were reported within Watamu Marine Reserve and close to Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area (Fig. 4). This is a coastal species, which sometimes associates with bottlenose dolphins.

Pilot whales were seen in large groups around Diani, Pemba Channel and Watamu. The only sperm whale sighting was reported off the Leopard Reef, near Malindi.

More information on our Facebook group: The Kenya Marine Mammal Network
Humpback whales migrate from cold to warm waters every year on their annual migration along the Western Indian Ocean, where they usually form groups of mother and calf. On the 13th of October, George Allen spotted a mother and calf around Manda Bay (Lamu). This species was also reported around Kikambala, Malindi and Watamu (Fig. 4).

A single killer whale was observed by Rob Coverdale around the North Ledge (Watamu), approaching his boat. On the same area, Mark Allen spotted a group of six individuals. On the Centre Mlima, Angus Paul reported another sighting with two killer whales. All these sightings were observed during the month of February and around the area known as “The Rips” (Fig. 4).
NEWS RELATED TO MARINE MAMMALS ALONG THE KENYAN COAST

**Indo-Pacific (IP) bottlenose and humpback dolphin movements**

After a few years collecting data on these species around Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area by GVI and around Malindi/Watamu Marine Protected Area by Watamu Marine Association, the collaboration between these research groups have found out dolphin movements along the Kenyan coast. These findings were possible through the comparison of the photo-identification catalogues of Indo-Pacific bottlenose and humpback dolphins.

Photo-ID refers to the identification of individuals by distinctive features (shape, outline, natural markings and scarring) of their dorsal fins, flanks and flukes. Some scars will be retained through life, whereas others will be added and may fade through life. The primary aim of photo-ID is to determine population size, habitat use, residency and social structure for the different dolphin species around the study areas. The IP bottlenose dolphin catalogue has 140 individuals in Kisite and 57 individuals in Watamu. And the IP humpback dolphin catalogue has 30 individuals in Kisite and 6 ind. in Watamu.

**IP bottlenose dolphins**

Two individuals were encountered in both catalogues. The first individual, name “Kijamba” in Kisite and “Kushoto” in Watamu, was seen around the south coast on 30 occasions between 2006 and 2009 and on the 22nd of November 2011 in Watamu. The second individual, name “Lala” in Kisite and “Maji” in Watamu, was observed on the 15th of November 2011 in Kisite and a week later in Watamu, travelling a minimum of 140 km on that period. Both bottlenose dolphins have been seen again in Kisite in 2012.

**IP humpback dolphins**

Only one individual was found on both catalogues. The animal was sighted on the 29th of August 2006 and on the 9th of December 2009 in Kisite, and on the 10th of April 2012 in Watamu.
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