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DO FEEDING HABITS FROM CANARY ISLANDS CETACEANS DIFFER FROM THOSE OF THEIR COASTAL RELATIVES?

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The Canary Islands are a major hotspot for marine mammals in European waters with 28 cetacean species recorded in the archipelago. Unique oceanographic characteristics are adequate for tropical and temperate-water cetaceans while the small extension of the continental shelf leads to the presence of both oceanic and inshore species. The aims of this study are to compare feeding habits of Canary Island cetaceans with other European populations that inhabit more coastal environments and to consider the likehood of competition for food between different cetacean species in the area. We analysed 23 non-empty stomachs from animals stranded between 1996 and 2006 including 13 species from the families Delphinidae, Physeteridae, Kogiidae and Ziphiidae. Two stomach did not contained hard remains and prey identification to species level was not possible. Cephalopod beaks were found in the remaining 21 stomachs whereas fish remains (otoliths and bones) were found only in 4 stomachs. Cephalopods of the families Ommastrephidae, Sepiidae and Enoploteuthidae were an important resource for dolphins whereas whales showed a preference for the oceanic families Histiotheutidae, Chiroteuthidae and Mastigoteuthidae. Almost 30% of the animals had plastics among the stomach contents with big plastic items being eaten by deep diving teuthophagous species.Plastic could be an important threat that needs to be considered in future conservation plans.