

RECORDS OF THE FRANCISCANA (*PONTOPORIA BLAINVILLEI*) IN THE SOUTHWESTERN RIO DE JANEIRO AND NORTHERNMOST SÃO PAULO STATE COASTS - BRAZIL

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The franciscana (*Pontoporia blainvillei*) inhabits coastal waters of the western South Atlantic from Espírito Santo State (~18°S), Brazil (Siciliano, 1994) to Chubut Province (~42°S), Argentina (Crespo *et al.*, 1998). Its distribution was assumed to be continuous. However recent studies have pointed out the existence of two discontinuities along the species range: between Ubatuba (23°20'S) and Macaé (22°25'S) and between Barra de Itabapoana (21°18'S) and Regência (19°40'S), southeastern Brazil (Siciliano and Santos, 1994; Siciliano, 2001). This note reports the occurrence of franciscana in the northernmost São Paulo State coast and southwestern Rio de Janeiro State coast (Figure 1). Information was obtained through a network of local volunteers and institutions, including governmental agencies and the media.

One specimen was found dead in 1995 in Praia da Fazenda, Picinguaba (044°50'W, 23°22'S), São Paulo State. The condylo-basal length (CBL) was about 30cm, though the extremities of the maxilla and premaxilla were damaged.

In August 1996, a damaged skull with a CBL over 33cm was found in Praia de Lopes Mendes (044°09'W, 23°10'S), Ilha Grande, Rio de Janeiro State. In December 2000 a 121cm long female was found stranded at Praia de Mambucaba, Angra dos Reis (044°32'W, 23°01'S). The third record in Baía da Ilha Grande refers to an 87cm long male calf collected alive by tourists at Piraquara de Dentro, Angra dos Reis (044°26'W, 22°59'S), on 21 January 2002. The specimen was debilitated and died 72hrs later.

The southwestern portion of Rio de Janeiro State shows oceanographic features similar to those observed in the

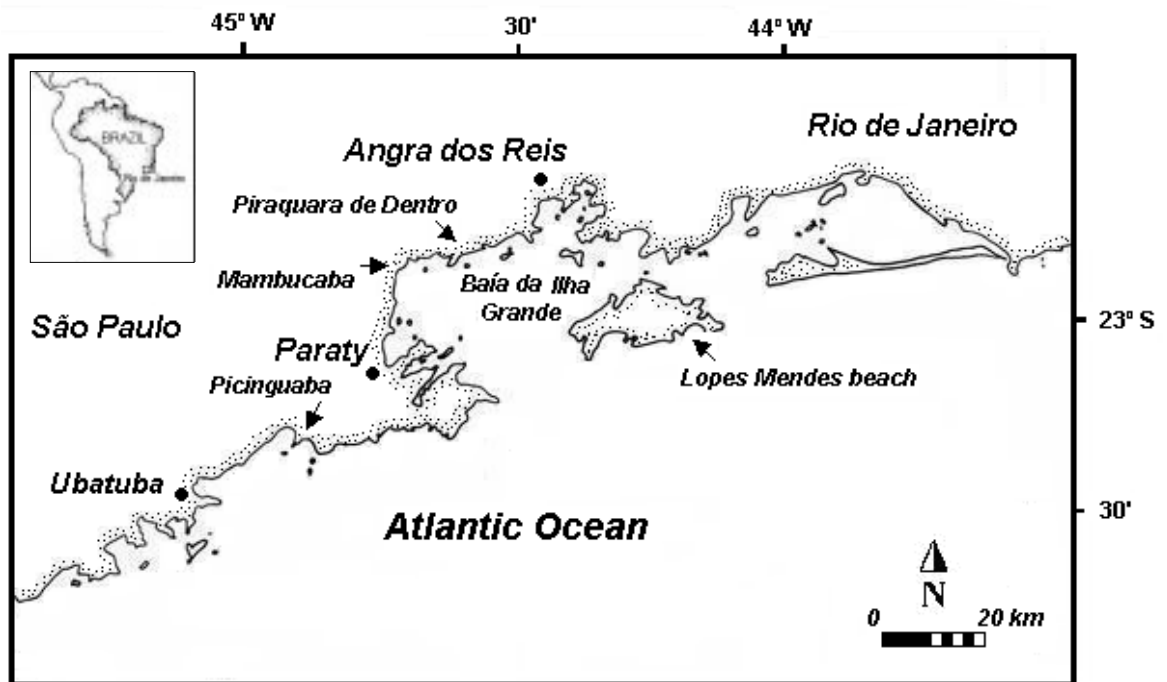


Figure 1. Arrows indicate record locations of franciscana in the southwestern Rio de Janeiro and northernmost São Paulo State coasts.

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middle and northern portions of São Paulo coast (Matsuura, 1995), where *P. blainvillei* has been frequently reported (Santos *et al.*, 2002).

The low number of records of franciscana at Baía da Ilha Grande may be related to the lack of systematic surveys for strandings and involvement of the species in fishing operations. It may also indicate that the species is rare in the area, supporting the hypothesis of a discontinuous distribution as proposed by Siciliano and Santos (1994). Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis showed no shared haplotypes between samples from northern Rio de Janeiro State and southern Rio Grande do Sul State (Secchi *et al.*, 1998). The population off northern Rio de Janeiro also revealed significant divergence in mtDNA sequences and frequencies when compared to other closer areas (e.g. São Paulo, Paraná and Santa Catarina states – Ott and Secchi, in preparation), suggesting some degree of isolation of the population occurring to the north of Rio de Janeiro State. Given the relevance of distribution patterns for determining franciscana' stocks (Secchi *et al.*, in press), systematic surveys between northern São Paulo and southwestern Rio de Janeiro states are strongly recommended. Potential threats to the conservation of the species, such as incidental by-catch in fisheries, should also be investigated in these areas.

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