PINNIPED RECORDS IN ATLANTIC COASTS OF SPAIN AND PORTUGAL BETWEEN 1990 AND 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Several pinniped species travel long distances to unusual locations, where they are frequently interpreted as vagrants. "Long distance movements of several pinniped species have been recorded in unusual locations, where…". With the exception of the monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) in the Macaronesian islands, there are no breeding colonies of other species at the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal, nor are they historically known.

RESULTS

Between 1990 and 2019, a total of 578 pinnipeds were recorded through stranding and sighting networks, representing 86.6% of all historical records for the area (123 records before 1990), belonging to seven species: *Halichoerus grypus* (68.2%), *Cystophora cristata* (10.9%); *Phoca vitulina* (5.1%), *Pagophilus groenlandicus* (0.7%), *Odobenus rosmarus* (0.6%), *Phoca hispida* (0.6%) and *Erignathus barbatus* (1.2%), and 12.6% unidentified specimens. These species do not reproduce in the area. Most of the records were reported in the northern coast of Spain (North Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Euskadi), with more than 2 individuals stranded for every 10 km of coastline (S/10km), on a regularly basis (annual) and with a strong seasonality.

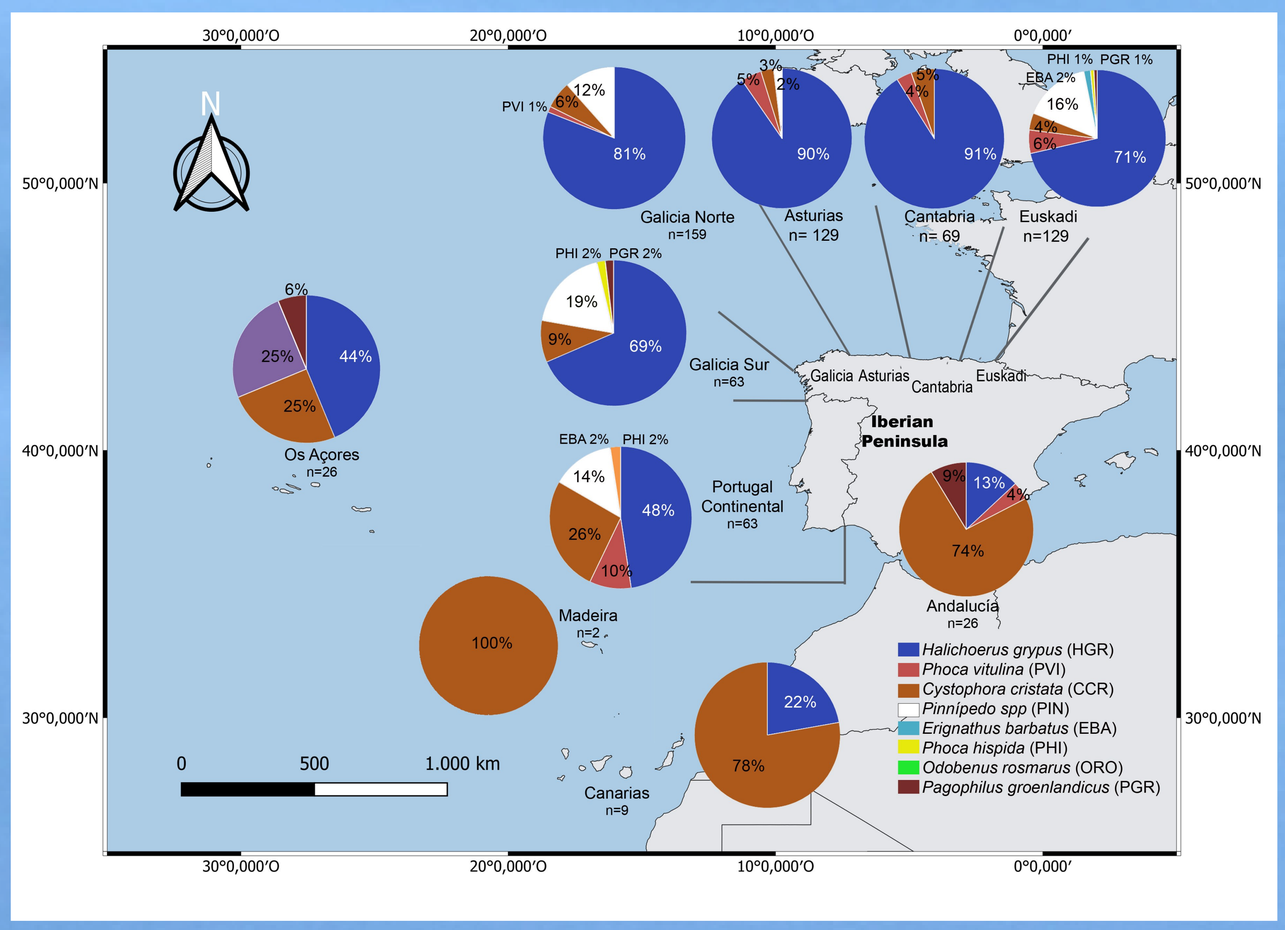

Figure 1. Map of the distribution of records by area and proportion of species in each area.

MATERIAL & METHODS

Records of strandings and sightings of pinnipeds which do not reproduce in the area, from the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic coast (including the islands), have been compiled based on reports and the annual records of the stranding networks of each subarea (Fig. 1).

Strandings occurred to a lesser extent in southern Galicia, mainland Portugal and Andalusia, with 1 to 2 S/10km, whereas the presence in the Macaronesian islands is sporadic with 0,04-0,2 S/10km and can be considered extralimital for all species. Concerning age classes, most of the individuals (90%) were pups that stranded after the post-weaning period and juveniles. The grey seals strandings accounted with 69.8% pups and 23.6% juveniles, and the hooded seals had 33.3% pups and 57.1% juveniles. The records show a clear seasonality during the year, with December-February being the period with most of the records for grey seal and July-October for hooded seal. A total of 214 individuals were observed alive and some of them (n=134) required a rehabilitation process, after which 63.5% could be returned to their environment. 7.7% of pinnipeds died from accidental capture in fisheries.

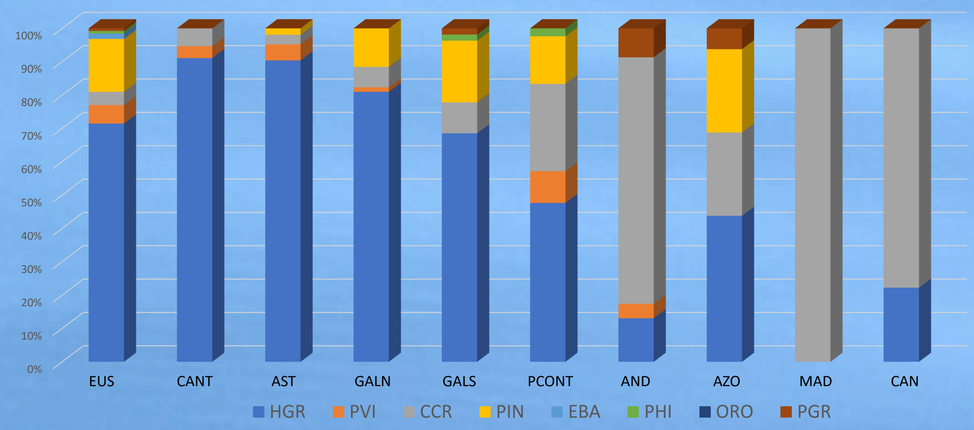

Figure 2. Proportion of species in each area.

CONCLUSIONS

- Records of pinnipeds have increased in recent years in the study area.
- Grey seal is the most frequent species and the high number of annual records leads us to consider the coast of the peninsula as the usual area of distribution of the species during the dispersal season.
- The rest of the species can be considered rare and with extralimital distribution.
- The pups and juveniles in dispersal are the ones with the most records of strandings for most of the species with a marked seasonality depending on the species.
- A significant number of specimens are stranded alive and are likely to be rehabilitated.