Located in the central northern Kenyan coast, the Watamu-Malindi and Watamu Banks IMMA includes a variety of habitats including shallow near shore reef, mangrove and sea grasses. The Watamu and the Malindi Marine Protected areas occur within the boundary of the IMMA, both of which support a high diversity of coastal marine life including corals, reef fish and sea turtles. Also included inside the border of the IMMA are the Watamu banks, which is a hotspot of diversity, famous for catches of large game fish, as well as a high frequency of humpback whale encounters. The deeper waters of the Watamu banks hosts spinner dolphins, pilot whales, brydes whales, and humpback whales on their seasonal migrations, while the near-shore waters of the Watamu coast are home to resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose and humpback dolphins.

Long-term studies of the Watamu area have been conducted during dedicated boat-based surveys and from 2010 to 2019, 141 individual Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphins have been photo-identified in this area. Indian Ocean humpback dolphins are occasionally sighted and a total of 8 semi-resident animals have been identified and catalogued.

Land-based observations of humpback whales have been made from a headland near Watamu recording regular whale sightings each year.
A resident population of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins has been observed to use the IMMA area (Mwang’ombe et al. 2015). From 2011-2014, 101 dedicated boat-based surveys were conducted that resulted in 92 sighting records of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins. From 2010 to 2019, 141 individual Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins were photo-identified in this area and the high re-sighting rate suggests that the population is resident. Mother-calf pairs are frequently sighted in the coastal zone. The distribution of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins that occur inside the Watamu-Malindi and Watamu Banks area shows a strong preference for the reefs inside the Watamu Marine Protected Area, where animals feed on inshore reef fish.

Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities
Sub-criterion C3: Migration Routes

The Watamu banks is an important area for breeding and migrating humpback whales, and the Kenya Marine Mammal Network, which logs all citizen science whale sightings, has more records from the Watamu Banks than from any other location. Although this is biased by effort, it is clear that the Watamu Banks is an important area for migrating and breeding humpback whales. Land-based observations of humpback whales have been made from a fixed land position on a headland near Watamu (Mwang’ombe et al. 2015). In 2014 land-based surveys recorded 54 sightings of humpback whale, which was the highest encounter rate (ER = 0.51/hour) compared to 2015 and 2016 (ER = 0.17/hour). Calves were sighted in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Supporting Information


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