



Promulgated in terms of the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board Act, 2008 (Act No. 5 of 2008)

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Sardine run 2022

May 2022

The KZNSB Operations Division undertook its first sardine observation flight of the 2022 season, on Thursday 12th May. This flight was conducted earlier than usual due to the continual reports of sardine activity in the Eastern Cape. Depending on the biomass of sardines, water temperatures and the inshore current conditions we expected to see signs of sardine activity somewhere between Mazeppa Bay and East London. Normal activity that accompanies any shoals of sardines include hundreds to thousands of Cape gannets, very large schools of Bottlenose and Common dolphins and often many sharks. These are all indicators that the staff keep an eye out for, on every flight.

During the first part of the flight into the Eastern Cape, spotting was made extremely difficult due to the amount of muddy, discoloured water from the April floods, between Waterfall Bluff and Port Saint Johns. However, as soon as we found some cleaner water off Umngazi River Bungalows, approximately 50 small pilot shoals of sardines/baitfish were spotted in this area, through to Brazen Head. These thin pockets of fish were very difficult to identify from the air, as there were no predators in pursuit, and the pockets were so thin that they had no colour. Then again, small thin pockets were seen shimmering on the surface off the Mthatha River and Mpame Point. The most concentrated activity sighted, was further south, starting at the Qholorha Mouth, Kei Mouth, Haga Haga, Chintsa, Gonubi and East London. Thousands of Cape gannets were seen spread out, sitting on the water in rafts throughout this area, with concentrated diving in some areas. These gannets were accompanied by hundreds of Common and Bottlenose Dolphins.

These early indications are all positive that the sardines are making their way up the Eastern Cape towards KwaZulu-Natal and are possibly a few weeks away. However there have been many occasions in the past when predictions and opinions have been totally incorrect. These fish can move through in the deep or in the discoloured water we are experiencing at the moment, out of sight of most of the predators and arrive in KZN without warning. Then there is always the possibility that they continue moving north on the deeper line and we don't get to see them at all.

The next flight to East London is scheduled for the 18th of May, however this is dependent on weather conditions. The Head of Operations of the KZNSB will continue to update information on activity as and when flights have been completed.

Greg thompson
Acting: Head of Operations
KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board

