Project Update: March 2023

Common bottlenose dolphins observed in the Bocas del Toro (BDT) outermost area like Cayo Zapatilla, Chiriquí Lagoon, and Changuinola coast, look like the offshore form. Therefore, samples from these dolphins were collected to confirm if they indeed belonged to this offshore form which would imply a genetic connectivity between BDT with other areas in the Caribbean. However, preliminary genetic analysis based on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) show these dolphins share the same inshore mtDNA haplotype reported previously in BDT. These samples were compared with others from Colombian Caribbean dolphins, which belong to the "worldwide distributed form", whose highly mobile individuals with both coastal and oceanic maintain genetic connectivity among inshore populations in the Caribbean. Genetic comparisons also confirm that outermost BDT dolphins belong to the inshore form and not group with offshore individuals. These new genetic findings still confirming the inshore habits of bottlenose dolphins in BDT, highlighting its relevance as a unique lineage in the Caribbean.

Dolphin biopsy in Bocas del Toro. © Dalia C. Barragán-Barrera.

Baby bottlenose dolphin in Bocas del Toro. © Dalia C. Barragán-Barrera.

Working in the field in Bocas del Toro. © Manali Rege-Colt.