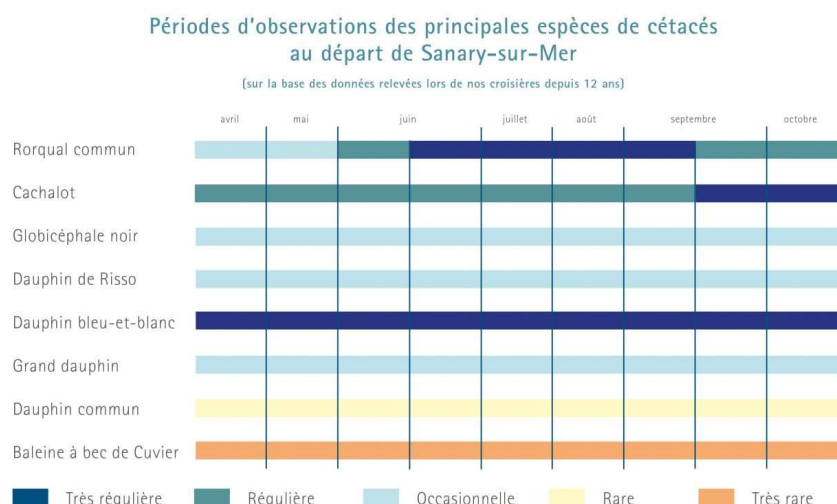


France is rarely mentioned as a place to do whale watching and many French people would actually never believe there are whales in the Mediterranean Sea fairly close to the shore. However, you would be amazed by how rich the waters still are in the south of France, especially in the Pelagos Sanctuary that was created several years ago between France, Italy and Corsica.

There are several French whale watching operators in the Mediterranean Sea, most of them being located in the French Riviera around Nice, or near Toulon or near Perpignan next to the Pyrenean mountains. However, we always used the same company called “Découverte du Vivant” that is working with 3 different boats located in Sanary-sur-Mer near Toulon, Port-Camargue near Montpellier and Canet-en-Roussillon near Perpignan. The operation in Canet has however recently stopped. Their trips are usually full-day long ones, well organized with large and stable boats and always include cetacean specialists and spotters on board. These guys have been operating for more than 12 years and they know very well the places where to look for the whales and dolphins: deep canyons or deep sea about 20km away from the shore.

Well of course, don't get me wrong, whale watching in France is not like California, Svalbard or the Azores islands but to be honest, we can see things in every trip and personally speaking, we could see up to 7 different cetacean species during about 20 trips done with them between 2019 and 2022. Some species like striped dolphins or fin whales are very common while others are uncommon like Risso's dolphins, sperm whales or pilot whales but with patience and regular trips I'd say you are more or less guarantee to see a lot, except probably for Cuvier's beaked whales. For this specific species, it looks likes based on last trips done in 2021 and 2022 that the best place and best chance to see them is with whale watching tours from Imperia, Italy, close to the French boarder. I'm not talking about rarities like orcas or humpback whales that could also be seen in the French Mediterranean Sea but they are super rare in the French area and nobody should count on it.

Below is the detailed list of what can typically be observed (and during which months of the year) during these whale watching trips in the Mediterranean Sea (sorry in French). I'm also adding some notes and photos taken during our observations:



Species we could observe during whale watching trips done in France (lifer in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	How often seen	Pic
Short-beaked common dolphin	Dauphin commun	Delphinus delphis	Rare and actually never observed during all of our trips	0
Striped dolphin	Dauphin bleu et blanc	Stenella coeruleoalba	Very common. Hundreds seen and observed 100% of the time during all the trips we did	X
Bottlenose dolphin	Grand dauphin	Tursiops truncatus	Uncommon. Only saw them at 3 different occasions	X
Risso's dolphin	Dauphin de Risso	Grampus griseus	Uncommon. Seen only twice.	X
Long-finned pilot whale	Globicéphale noir	Globicephala melas	Uncommon. Only seen once but what a memorable observation and encounter!	X
Fin whale	Rorqual commun	Balaenoptera physalus	Very common. Few individuals seen in almost every trip we did	X
Sperm whale	Cachalot	Physeter macrocephalus	Uncommon. Quite regularly observed and the year 2022 was especially good with many sightings	X
Cuvier's beaked whale	Baleine à bec de Cuvier	Ziphius cavirostris	Beaked whales are rarely observed but we had luck to see them a few times in very good conditions, always from the Imperia tours	X
Total Species Recorded = 7				

I'm adding some pictures I took on all the species we observed during such whale watching trips.



Striped dolphin



Striped dolphin



Fin whale



Fin whale (unusual fluke)



Risso's dolphin



Risso's dolphin



Long-finned pilot whale



Long-finned pilot whale



Cuvier's beaked whale



Cuvier's beaked whale



Sperm whale



Sperm whale



Bottlenose dolphin



Bottlenose dolphin