

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

## PONTA DO PICO ISRA

### European Atlantic Region

#### SUMMARY

Ponta do Pico is located on the southeast coast of Pico Island, in the Azores Archipelago, Portugal. The coastline is characterised by bays, inlets, and rocky reefs with an absent shelf in the steep south facing wall and a long submarine prolongment of the island towards the southeast forming a large and productive bank. Sea surface temperatures are lower in the boreal winter and higher in summer, with chlorophyll-*a* concentrations being highest in winter and spring. Within this area there are: **threatened species** and **feeding areas** (Whale Shark *Rhincodon typus*).

#### CRITERIA

**Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C2 - Feeding Areas**

— —  
**PORTUGAL**  
 — —  
**0-1,750 metres**  
 — —  
**95.44 km<sup>2</sup>**  
 — —





## DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Ponta do Pico is located on the southeast coast of Pico Island, in the Azores Archipelago, an autonomous region of Portugal. The coastline is characterised by the presence of bays, inlets, rocky areas, and reefs with an almost absent shelf in the steep south facing wall and a long submarine prolongment of the island towards the southeast forming a large and productive bank (Azevedo Neto et al. 2020; EEA 2025).

The area has temperate conditions as a result of the confluence of the North Atlantic Current and the Azores Current and is highly influenced by strong currents (Afonso et al. 2020). Sea surface temperatures are lower in the boreal winter (~14-15°C) and higher in summer (~23-24°C), with chlorophyll- $\alpha$  concentrations being highest (~0.43 mg m<sup>-3</sup>) in winter and spring (Amorim et al. 2017).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 1,750 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

## ISRA CRITERIA

### CRITERION A - VULNERABILITY

One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Endangered Whale Shark (Pierce & Norman 2016).

### SUB-CRITERION C<sub>2</sub> - FEEDING AREAS

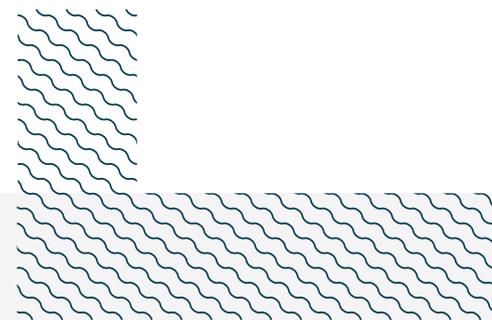
Ponta do Pico is an important feeding area for one shark species.

Observations from fishery observers, animal-borne camera tags, and underwater visual census (UVC) surveys have shown that Whale Sharks regularly aggregate in the area to feed on baitfish (Fontes et al. 2020, 2024; B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025).

Records of Whale Sharks associated with the pole-and-line tuna fishery in the Azores operating between May–November were collected by fishery observers between 2008–2013 (Fontes et al. 2020). Whale Sharks were recorded in association with tunas and were observed preying on bait balls of snipefishes (*Macroramphosus* spp.) corralled by large schools of Bluefin Tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), Bigeye Tuna (*T. obesus*), Skipjack (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), and Yellowfin Tuna (*T. albacares*), with the second largest number of associations across the archipelago (after Santa María Island) recorded in this area (Fontes et al. 2020, 2024; B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025). This behaviour was also observed daily during UVCs and tagging trips conducted in the area during summer between 2019–2024 and from videos recorded by animal-borne tags where 166 sightings of Whale Sharks feeding were recorded (B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025). It has been reported that Whale Shark observations increase in these months when the sea surface temperature is highest (22–24°C) and chlorophyll- $\alpha$  decreases (Afonso et al. 2014).

Photographs were also collected between 2008–2022 from UVCs and the diving community across the Azores (Alsina 2021; B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025). Of 182 Whale Sharks photo-identified, 80 (43.9%) were recorded around Ponta do Pico. Individuals were recorded between July–November with a higher number observed in August and September (Alsina 2021; B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025) which matches the season when the tuna fishery operates in the area. In addition, Whale Sharks tagged either with satellite transmitters (n = 19) or with biologgers (n = 24) and

monitored between 2019–2024 showed that individuals move around Ponta do Pico during summer months (B Macena et al. unpubl. data 2025).



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### **Acknowledgments**

Bruno Macena (Institute of Marine Sciences-OKEANOS, University of the Azores), Jorge Fontes (Institute of Marine Sciences-OKEANOS, University of the Azores), Pedro Afonso (Institute of Marine Sciences-OKEANOS, University of the Azores), and Emiliano García Rodríguez (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group – ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2025 ISRA Region 02 – European Atlantic workshop for their contributions to this process.

This factsheet has undergone review by the ISRA Independent Review Panel prior to its publication.

This project was funded by the Shark Conservation Fund, a philanthropic collaborative pooling expertise and resources to meet the threats facing the world’s sharks and rays. The Shark Conservation Fund is a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

### **Suggested citation**

**IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. 2025.** Ponta do Pico ISRA Factsheet. Dubai: IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group.

## QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met									
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2	
<b>SHARKS</b>													
<i>Rhincodon typus</i>	Whale Shark	EN	0-1,928	X			X						

## SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
<b>SHARKS</b>		
<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Blue Shark	NT
<b>RAYS</b>		
<i>Mobula tarapacana</i>	Sicklefin Devil Ray	EN

*IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org) Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.*





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