

THE COMMON BOWWAL; *BALAENOPTERA PHYSALUS*
A NEW RECORD FOR THE ARAB GULF

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One whale got stranded in Khor-al-Hamra, Ras-al-Khima (UAE) on 6 April 1978 (Fig. 1). The Natural History Museum of the United Arab Emirates University was informed about the whale stranding and we visited the area and saw the whale on the next day. We were told that the whale was alive but with little movement when stranded on 6 April. By the time we reached the whale it was dead and partly putrefied by the intense sun.

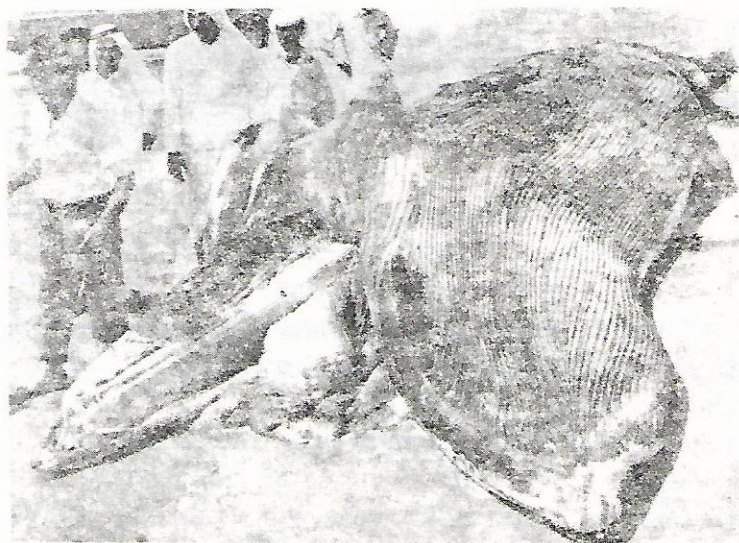


Fig. 1. *Balaenoptera physalus* stranded in Khor-al-Hamra, Ras-al-Khima on 6 April 1978. (Photo. Al-Robaae)

The overall colouration at the time of our visit was dark, the dorsal side more so than the ventral side. We photographed the specimen and took the measurements. The measurements in cm are : Total length : 1350 ; Length of flipper : 150 ; Width of flipper : 34 ; Snout to nostril : 230 ; Snout to eye : 244 ; Snout to lower jaw : 300 ; Circumference (between flipper and eyes : 500 ; Number of ventral grooves : 80 ; Length of groove (longest) : 1000 ; length of dorsal fin : 48 ; Height of dorsal fin : 40 ; and Length of penis : 120 (Fig. 2).

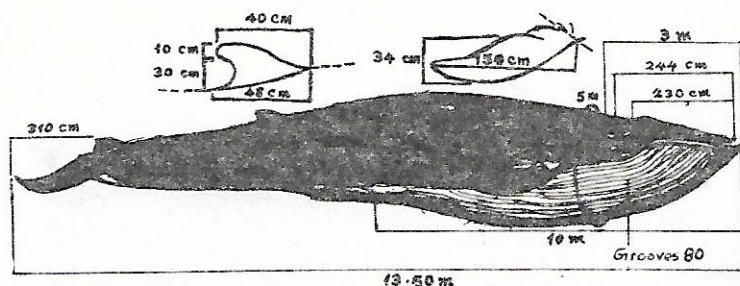


Fig. 2. Measurements of *Balaenoptera physalus* stranded in Khor-al-Hamra on 6 April 1978.

We tried to pull the whale to the dry shore but could not succeed. The cars could not reach near the whale for pulling because of the muddy loose ground. Ultimately we dug a hole bigger than the size of the whale by the side of it and rolled the whale into it and thus buried it in the intertidal zone. After about a year the bones were dug out. The skeleton was remarkably clean of oil. We washed the bones and put in the sun on the shore for two weeks. All bones were marked to indicate their respective positions and taken to the Museum. The skeleton is now exhibited in the Natural History Museum of the UAE University. Except for a few phalanges on both sides, the skeleton is rather complete.

Balaenoptera acutorostrata, *B. edeni*, and *B. borealis* have ventral grooves less than 80. Our specimen has 80 ventral grooves which comes within the range of *B. musculus* (80-100) and *B. physalus* (70-110). *B. musculus* has pale spots all over entire body and the flipper about 1/7th of the total length. The lack of spots on the body together with the relatively small flipper — 1/9th of the total length — identify our specimen as *Balaenoptera physalus* (Linnaeus) the Common Rorqual.

Description : Total length 18.50-25 m (male on the average 60 cm longer than the female). Seen from above the front part of the head is wedge-shaped. Hind part of the back with a conspicuous dorsal ridge. Dorsal fin relatively small, but slightly larger than that of the Blue Whale. Pectoral fins c. 1/9 to 1/10 of the total length. 70-110 furrows underneath (average 85). Asymmetrically coloured ; upperside grey, underside white, right lower jaw white, left lower jaw grey ; the inside of the mouth pigmented on the right side, unpigmented on the left ;

pigmentation of the tongue also predominantly on the right. In each half of the upper jaw 320-420 baleen plates ; one-third (the front part) of the plates on the right side of the jaw are white, the others, and the baleen plates of the left jaw are dull blue-grey or striped ; the fringe is yellowish-white. The ventral surface of the pectoral fins is white (Brink 1973). The total length of our specimen 13.50 m indicates that it is an young one.

Distribution : Brink (1973) gives as : Greenland, Iceland, Spitsbergen, Bear Island to the Kara Sea and Novaya Zemlya ; Faeroes, British Isles, Ireland. Along the whole Norwegian coast. A few records in the Baltic : Sweden, Poland, Germany. North Sea ; Great Britain, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, English Channel ; France, Spain, Portugal. Fairly regular in the Mediterranean : France, Italy (also in the Adriatic). Azores.

The Common Rorqual inhabits all oceans, the largest population is in Antarctic ; only rarely found in coastal waters. This whale generally migrates to areas of cold water in summer for feeding and to warmer seas in the winter for breeding. The food is small crustaceans and small pelagic fishes like herring, mackerel and saury are also eaten (Ridgway, 1972).

Previous whale strandings on the coast of the UAE : I was told that about ten years back one big whale was stranded in the UAE. One nearly complete vertebral column of a whale was seen in the intertidal zone in Dayyinah island in 1978. In the same year I have also seen vertebrae of whale in Zirkuh and Arzanah islands. All these vertebrae appear to belong to species of *Balaenoptera*.

The whales recorded from the Arab Gulf todate are : *B. musculus* (Blanford, 1876 and Al-Robaee, 1971), *B. edeni* (Mahdi, 1967 and Al-Robaee, 1969) and *Megaptera novaeangliae* (Hatt, 1959). Therefore, the present finding of the Common Rorqual *Balaenoptera physalus* from the southern part of the Arab Gulf is a new record for the Arab Gulf.

SUMMARY

A new record of Strnded *Balaenoptera Physalus* has been made for the First time in Khor-al-Hamra, Ras al-Khaima (UAE) on April 6, 1978. Which is a new eddition to oetacean Fauna of the Arab Gulf.

ملخص البحث

حوت الهرقول *Balaenoptera Physalus* الذي وجد على شواطئ خور الحمرا برأس الخيمة (دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة) يوم ٦ نيسان ١٩٧٨ هو تسجيل جديد للمرة الاولى في الخليج العربي يضاف الى مجموعة الحيتان المسجلة في المنطقة سابقا . .

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