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FIRST RECORD OF AN ENDANGERED FINLESS PORPOISE *NEOPHOCAENA PHOCAENOIDES* FROM PORTO NOVO, SOUTHEAST COAST OF INDIA

ABSTRACT

One young male finless porpoise *Neophocaena phocaenoides* was accidentally caught during gillnet operation off Porto Novo (11°29'N, 79°46'E) for the first time. The morphometry and gut content are reported here.

CETACEANS are common in Porto Novo vicinity. Representatives of family Delphinidae *viz. Stenella longirostris* and *Tursiops truncatus aduncus* were reported by Rajaguru and Natarajan (1985) and Natarajan and Rajaguru (1985). Along with these species Kumaran (1989) recorded few specimens of *Sousa chinensis* and one young female *Ziphius cavirostris* belonging to the family Ziphidae. It is for the first time a finless Porpoise *Neophocaena phocaenoides* from the family Phocaenoidae, was collected from porto Novo during an inshore gillnet operation in the early hours of 29th January 1992.

The distribution range of this species has been stated as in coastal waters and estuaries of Indo-Pacific from Iran and Pakistan in the west, throughout the coasts of India, southeast Asia and Indonesia and north to China and northern Japan (Evans, 1984). Leatherwood and Reeves (1983) identified the range of occurrence of this species as the coastal and estuarine regions from Pakistan, along the entire Indian subcontinent, throughout southeast Asia and Indonesia, north to China, Korea and Japan. James and Lal Mohan (1987) listed this species as occurring along the Indian Coast.

The porpoise looked somewhat like a beluga. Its melon was bluff and rounded, but not bulbous. It had no beak as the members of the family Phocoenidae. The mouthline is curved upward towards the eye. There was a slight depression behind the crescentic blowhole, which may be regarded as a neck crease. The blowhole was on top of the head.

Dorsal fin was absent. The animal was slate grey in colour on the dorsal side and more paler on the ventral side. A conspicuous dentriculated area begins ahead of mid back and extends back on the dorsal surface of the peduncle. The skin on this area was dark and covered with small tubercles or horny papillae.

The trailing edge of the flukes was concave and it had a notch between the flukes. The teeth has not erupted.

The animal was in good condition and remained free from both external and internal parasites. The morphometric measurements are given in Table 1. The animal was cut open and found to be an immature male.

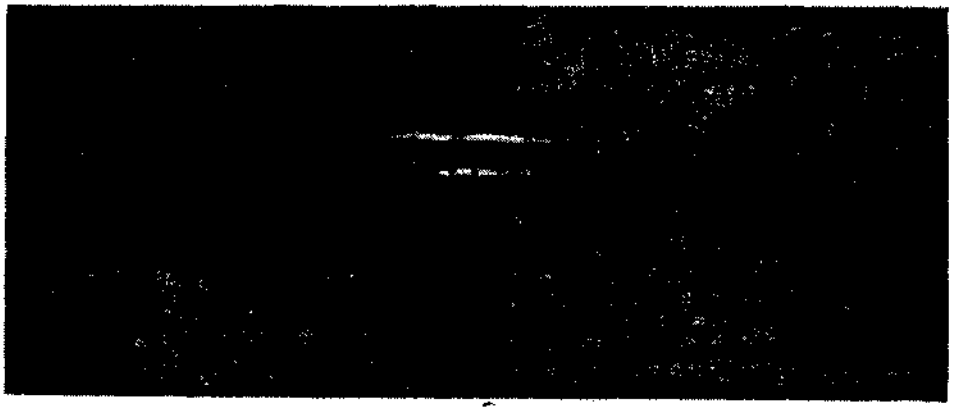

FIG. 1. The finless porpoise *Neophocaena phocaenoides*.

The gut was cut open and the three chambers *viz.* forestomach, midstomach and hindstomach were noticed. There were few remnants of semidigested prawns and fishes in the midstomach. The wall of the midstomach was uneven with many ridges and elevations indicating its active participation in the process of digestion. The hindstomach and intestine had only semidigested chyme. The identification of fishes and prawns was impossible, because of their semidigested condition. Leatherwood and Reeves (1983), James and Lal Mohan (1987), Evans (1984) have also noticed prawns and fishes as the preferred food items of *Neophocaena phocaenoides*.

TABLE 1. *Morphometrics of the finless porpoise collected from Portonovo, India on 29th January*, 1992

Particulars		Measurement (cm)
Total length	..	139
Snout to blowhole	..	15
Snout to genital	..	77.5
Snout to anus	..	93
Width of the caudal peduncle	..	34
Length of the flippers	..	23
Base of the flippers	..	8
Total body weight	..	28 kg

Evans (1984) has indicated that the individuals of this species range from 140 to 165 cm in length and from 30 to 45 kg in weight. Leatherwood and Reeves (1983) suggested a maximum length of 190 cm and the length at the time of attaining physical maturity is 160 cm. They also stated that the smallest calf born in the Yangtze River was about 54 cm long.

The present specimen was not just born, because it had prawns and fish in its stomach, but the teeth had not erupted. The animal was 139 cm in length and 28 kg in weight. So the body length of the individuals at birth for this population of finless porpoise may be lower than those observed by Evans (1984), but somewhat higher than those suggested by

Leatherwood and Reeves (1983). In fact Evans (1984) has suggested possible differences in the morphometric characteristics between different populations and Leatherwood and Reeves (1983) indicated different races or even suggested the possibility of subspecies status to the animals living at different localities in their distributional range.

The other three species of dolphins already noticed in this area are not in the endangered list. But *Neophocaena phocaenoides* is in the Endangered Species List by CITES (Nilson, 1983) from Indian waters.

It is encouraging to notice this endangered species in Porto Novo showing its presence in places other than those already recorded. But the problem of interaction between gillnet fisheries and small odontocetes has become a new challenge to be tackled. Care should be taken to minimise this problem of this interaction.

After taking samples of blubber, liver, muscle and kidney for chemical analysis, the animal was buried under soil for about 25 days and taken out on 24th February 1992. 18 teeth were observed in each jaw and most of the teeth were spade shaped and some of them were very sharp, which may attain the spade shape while erupting. Other osteological details will be published soon.

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