normal two (a characteristic of the Family Sciaenidae). However no records of abnormalities in dorsal spines of fishes are available to the author's knowledge. Hence the present instance appears to be the first one recorded in *Triacanthus brevirostris.*

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THE STRANDING OF RORQUAL WHALE *BALAENOPTERA MUSCULUS* (LINNAEUS) IN THE GULF OF MANNAR

ABSTRACT

The note embodies observations on the stranding of a rorqual whale *Balaenoptera musculus* (Linnaeus) measuring 6.35 m in total length in the shallow waters off Ovari on 20-12-1976. This is the first recorded instance of stranding of this species alive along this coast. General morphological features are given. Instances of strandings in other parts of the country are also listed.

INSTANCES of whales getting stranded in the shallow waters of the Indian Coast and subsequently being washed ashore are not uncommon. Perhaps no other region in the east coast enjoys as much of reputation for the frequency of such strandings as in the case of Gulf of Mannar. This is aptly borne by a number of instances of whale stranding reported by Silas and Kumara Pillay (1960) and Alagarswami *et al.* (1973). From the available literature on the subject, it appears that the Rorqual whale *Balaenoptera musculus* frequents the coastal waters more often and gets stranded on many occasions. Fibbson - Hill (1950) remarked that the Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus* (Linnaeus) moves shoreward at intervals on the coasts of India and Sri Lanka. Prater (1915), Moses (1947), Nagabhushanam and Dhulkhed (1964), Venkataraman and Girijavallabhan (1966), Daniel (1963) and Bensam *et al.* (1972) have dealt with the Sibbald's Rorqual *Balaenoptera musculus.* The present note records one more instances of a recent stranding of *B. musculus* in the Gulf of Mannar, near Ovari, a fishing village (77° 54' E and 08° 16' N) on the early hours of 20–12–1976.

Silas and Kumara Pillay (1960) reported on the stranding of whales on 27th November 1960 of the same centre with simultaneous strandings at three other centres along a coastal stretch of about 300 km within a few days apart. This is the second record of the occurrence of *B. musculus* in this zone after an interval of 8 years. The previous record of stranding of this species was at Tuticorin on 2–4–1969 which was reported by Bensam *et al.* (1972).

The whale was sighted struggling in the shallow Bay at low tide about 50 m from the shore. A contingent of 70 fishermen reached the spot in catamarans and managed to tow the animal uninjured to the shore (Pl. I A). It may be mentioned here that in 1973 a large herd of pilot whales got stranded in the shallow areas of Manapad (Alagarswami *et al.*, 1973). Therefore, the news of the stranding of a whale in this zone after an interval of four years evoked considerable public interest and received wide publicity in the local news papers resulting in hundreds of people visiting the landing centre to have a look at the live animal. The animal survived for two days after which the fishermen cut it and detailed observations were made by the authors.

The whale was an immature female. This specimen is said to attain maturity at an average length of 77 feet (Gibbson - Hill, 1950). The intestine measured 30 m long. Gut contents were collected and a definite identification of food items was not possible, because of the semi-digested condition of the contents. Throughout the dorsal and lateral side the colour was uniformly dark slate blue. Ventral sides of flippers were pale and light rosy in colour. The region of ventral furrows was pale and light yellow. The dorsal fin was small, placed far behind and more towards the tail. The ratio of flipper length to total length worked out 1 : 6.8. The predorsal length was 1.5 and the base of the dorsal 26 out of the total length. The relation between head length and total length found to be 1 : 4.3. There were 88 furrows and the maximum length of furrows at mid ventral measured 375 cm extending far back to the umblicus (Pl. I B). The baleen plates were utter black and 390 plates were counted on right half of the upper jaw. These characteristics bring the specific identify of this specimen to *B. musculus* (Linnaeus).

Body measurements in cm of the whale were recorded and given below for the purpose of future comparison.

Total length from snout to fork of caudal flukes	635
Snout to origin of dorsal	443
Snout to origin of flipper	178
Snout to anterior margin of blow hole	84
Snout to front end of eye slit	106
Tip of lower jaw to genital slit	440
Tip of lower jaw to umblicus	335
Tip of lower jaw to anus	460
Maximum length of furrow at mid ventral	375
Cleft mouth (head length)	147
Maximum width of blow hole at posterior end	11
Eye slit	12
Nasal cleft	15
Length of flipper	95
Width of flipper at the base	115
Base at flipper	31
Girth at dorsal fin	173
Girth at flippers	272
Girth at posterior margin of eye	250
Girth at posterior margin of flipper	286
Girth anterior to caudal flukes	89
Base of dorsal	26
Anterior margin of dorsal	28
Height of dorsal	11.5
Length of caudal fluke from base	101
Length of one half of caudal fluke from fork	75
Distance between fluke ends	102
Distance between hind end of dorsal and fork of tail	166

Number of furrows between flippers	70
Number of furrows between eyes	88
Thickness of the skin	4

Of all the available records, the present record represents the smallest of the blue whales stranded along the coasts of India. Some of the reported instances are given in Table 1.

The authors are grateful to Mr. S. Mahadevan for his constructive suggestions and to Mr. K. Nagappan Nayar for his keen interest in this observation.

TABLE 1. *Stranded* B. musculus *in different parts of India and Sri Lanka*

Date	Place	Total length in metre	Reporting authors
August, 1912	Viziadrug, Ratnagiri	20.00	Prater, 1915
1932	Nirodumunai, Sri Lanka	11.70	Moses, 1947
23–2–63	Surat, Gujarat	20.28	Daniel, 1963
21–4–64	Muloor, South Kanara	15.76	Nagabhushanam and Dhulkhed, 1964
25–5–66	Calicut, Kerala	15.51	Venkataraman and Girijavallabhan, 1966
2–4–69	Tuticorin, Tamilnadu	11.26	Bensam *et al.*, 1972
20–12–76	Ovari, Tamilnadu	6.35	Present study

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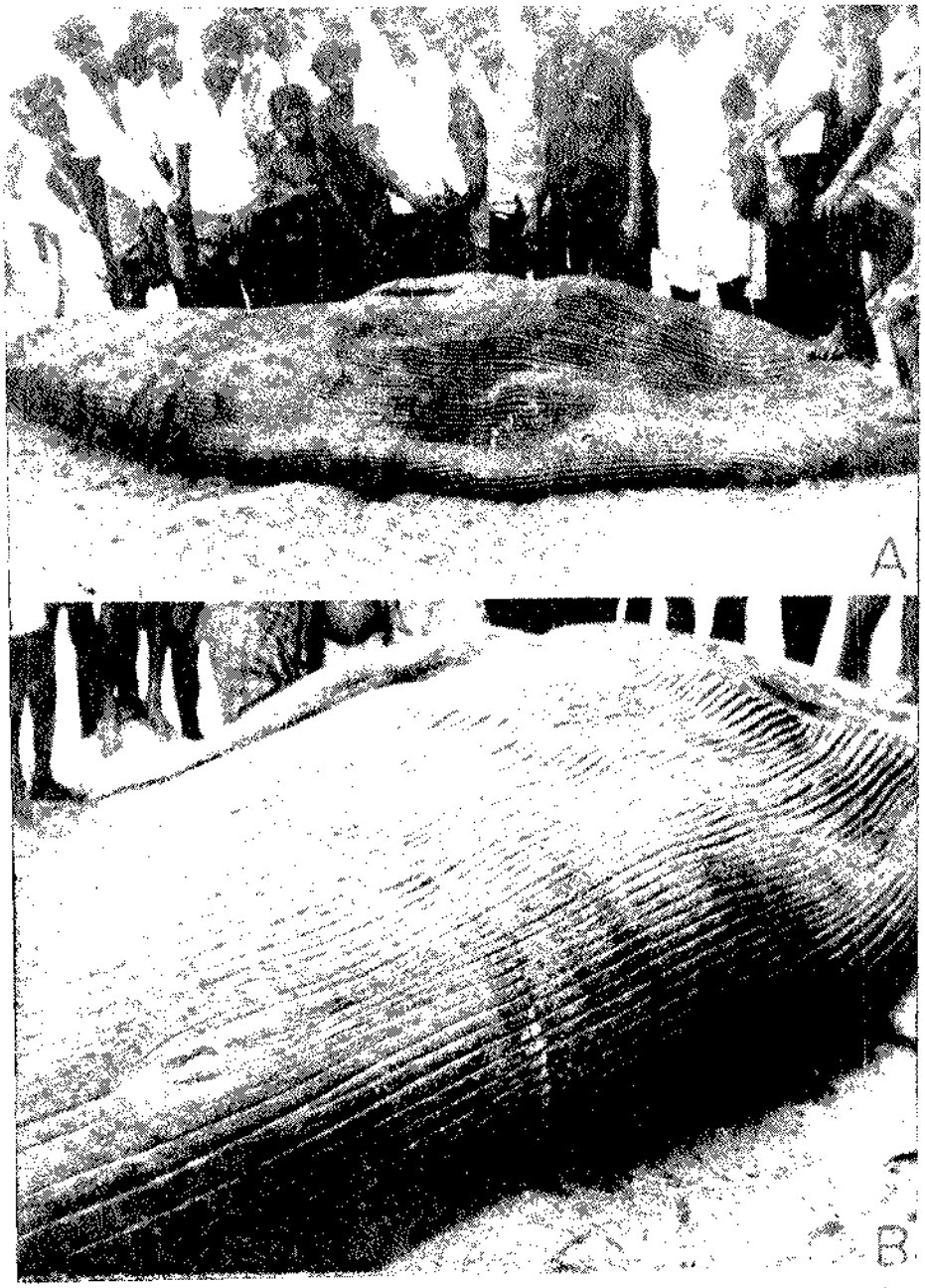

PLATE I A. *Balaenoptera musculus* (Linn.) caught off Gwari on 20-1-1976 and its lengthy flippers and ventral furrows.