

ON A WHALE WASHED ASHORE AT CALICUT

A DEAD whale was washed ashore at a place called Kannanparambu, about 1x km. south of South Beach, one of the fish landing centres of Calicut on the afternoon of 25th May 1966. The whale was first noticed that morning off Vellayil fish landing centre with its ventral portion rising out of water surface. The fishermen at first mistook the same for an upturned boat, but as they observed it at close quarters, they could recognise the whale (Fig. 1). On an examination, it was found to be in a putrefied state, though not in an advanced state of decomposition.

The following measurements of the whale were taken :

Total length (tip of lower jaw to tip of flukes) :	..	13.51 metres
Length of left flipper :	..	1.57 "
Length of left fluke	..	1.47 "
Length of upper jaw	..	2.21 "
Length of lower jaw	..	3.02 "
Length of base of dorsal fin	..	0.76 "
Length from base of dorsal fin to caudal peduncle	..	3.96 "
Girth around shoulders (approximate)	..	3.30 "

Though the characteristic whalebone or ' baleen ' was missing (probably washed away) the stranded whale could be identified as Rorqual belonging to the genus *Balaenoptera*, on account of its ' shorter and flatter head, the narrow flippers, the long and slender body, the presence of a fin on the back and of deep parallel furrows in the skin of the throat and chest ' (Lydekker, revised by Harmer 1922). The ratio of flipper length to total body length of the specimen was 1 : 8.6. The ventral grooves were bright yellow. These characteristics suggest that the specimen could be *B. musculus* (Linn.) (Gibson-Hill, 1950).



FIG. 1. Photograph of the whale washed ashore at Calicut

From a scrutiny of a list of stranded whales on the coasts of India, recorded by Chacko and Mathew (1954), it is seen that there had been 3 instances of stranded

whales near Calicut, one at Pudiyangadi (1924), another at West Hill (1925) and the third at Naduvattam (1947). A recent record of a stranded whale on the West Coast is that of a Rorqual, *Balaenoptera musculus* (Linn.) found washed ashore in Muloor village in South Kanara on 21st April 1964 (Nagabhushanam & Dhulkhed, 1964).

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