

ON A RORQUAL, *BALAENOPTERA* SP. CAUGHT OFF TUTICORIN,
GULF OF MANNAR

ABSTRACT

The note records the capture of a baleen whale (*Balaenoptera musculus?*) of 11.26 m in total length from the fishing grounds off Tuticorin on April 2, 1969.

MOSES (1947) has given a list of the whales stranded along the coasts of India. More recently Rao (1961), Nagabhushanam and Dhulkhed (1964), Silas (1964) and Kharbari *et al.* (1968) have recorded the stranding or occurrence of whales from different parts of the country. On 2-4-1969 a whale was sighted by a few fishermen off Tuticorin while it got stranded in the shallow sea. It was tied to their canoe but when they started for shore, the whale, obviously frightened, began moving in all directions pulling the canoe with the fishermen in it. After about eight hours of struggle the whale was shot at by riflemen from a powerboat, killed and brought ashore. It created a sensation locally, being unheard of and unseen in the living memory of the local fishermen. The whale was exhibited for four days at Tuticorin (Fig. 1) and large number of people viewed the animal.



Fig 1. Photograph of the whale caught off Tuticorin on 2-4-1969.

The measurements taken on the whale are given below :

	Measurement (cm)
Total length (tip of snout to fork of tail)	1126.00
Predorsal length	786.00
Snout to eye	200.00
Snout to angle of mouth	197.00
Snout to anterior insertion of flipper	327.00
Snout to blow hole	168.00
Length of flipper (from anterior insertion to tip)	137.00
Width of flipper	30.50
Tip of lower jaw to anus	807.00
Hind end of dorsal fin to fork of tail	297.00
Base of dorsal fin	43.00
Length of one half of caudal fluke from fork	117.00
Vent to genital opening	29.50
Length of genital opening	77.00
Eye diameter	12.50
Anterior margin of dorsal fin	46.00
Width of caudal peduncle	72.00
Length of the largest ventral furrow	565.00
Length of each blow hole	25.70
Depth of body midway between vent and caudal	126.70
Depth of body at dorsal fin	167.50
Depth of body at anus	169.00
Depth of body at flippers	237.60

It was a juvenile female with an estimated weight of 5 tonnes. The body was blackish blue-grey dorsally and flesh coloured ventrally including the lower side of the flippers. There were 61 furrows ventrally, reaching as far back as the navel. The baleen plates were black posteriorly but yellowish anteriorly. The head was about 6 and the flippers 8 in total length. The dorsal fin was low, small and placed far back on the body. The predorsal length was 1.5 and the dorsal fin base was about 26 of total length. A definite identification is not possible. However, these features, particularly the colouration, the length of the furrows, length of flippers and the relation between the dorsal base and total length, bring the specific identity of this specimen nearest to *Balaenoptera musculus*, popularly called the Blue whale.

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Central Marine Fisheries Research Sub-Station,
Tuticorin.

P. BENSAM
S. G. VINCENT
P. K. MAHADEVAN PILLAI

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