



Figure 1 - Risso's Dolphin #88-3 being hoisted by a "boom" at Skidegate Inlet.
Photo Credit: Allan Cowan

STRANDED WHALE AND DOLPHIN PROGRAM 1988 REPORT

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REPORT ALL CETACEAN STRANDINGS AND INCIDENTAL CATCHES TO 756-7777 or 380-1925.

The Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program of B.C. was started in 1987 (Baird et al. 1988). The stranding program has a variety of purposes, but primarily functions to ensure that the maximum amount of information and use can be made from each stranded cetacean. This includes both the use of carcasses for scientific and educational purposes, and the dissemination and use of the information obtained for scientific studies. Records of stranded cetaceans are valuable in determining the range and relative abundance of rare or unusual species, and can help identify potential limiting factors to various populations, such as pollution levels and the number killed incidentally in net fisheries. Some of the information obtained to date has been valuable in assessing the status of certain species for COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) and has been the basis of, or used in, several publications and reports (Langelier et al. 1988; Baird et al. 1989; Baird and Stacey 1988; Stacey and Baird 1988, 1989; Leatherwood et al. 1989). The SWDP has been able to provide skeletons for the research collection of the Royal British Columbia Museum, tissues for environmental pollutant and genetic studies at the Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg, and live nematodes for Italian researchers studying genetic variability of nematodes around the world.

The purposes of this report are to encourage reporting of cetacean strandings and incidental catches in B.C. and to disseminate information gained through the stranding program in 1988.

Strandings result from a variety of, as yet, incompletely understood causes. Individual cetaceans that strand on the beach alive are usually doing so in response to illness. Because much of the B.C. coastline is isolated and inaccessible, many cetaceans might strand alive, but not be found until they have already died. Similarly, some animals found dead may have actually died offshore due to an incidental catch in a fishery, such as gillnet or other fisheries, and then washed ashore. Occasionally it is possible to determine these mortalities as net-induced from the nature of external wounds and evidence of drowning. Positive determination of cause of death in stranded cetaceans is often impossible because of advanced decomposition or because the animal is washed away from the beach. One of the most critical stages in the investigation of a stranding is having the carcass secured to shore with a rope so it will not drift off with the tides. Prompt reporting is necessary to gain the most from strandings, and it is hoped that through education, the public will learn to contact the Stranding Program or other appropriate agencies so that a thorough investigation of each stranding can take place. This is especially important in the Queen Charlotte Islands and isolated areas on the British Columbia coastline.

Participants in the stranding program include a number of volunteers, and the following organizations; the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Royal British Columbia Museum, the Port Hardy Museum and Archives, and the Vancouver Public Aquarium. Besides current strandings, we are interested in finding out about any strandings that have occurred in the past, for comparison of historical and recent records. If anyone knows of any cetacean strandings in British Columbia, either current or past, please report them to the authors at 756-7777 or 380-1925.

Twenty-eight strandings or incidental catches were reported to the stranding program in 1988, and are presented in Table 1. A total of nine species were recorded, the same number as in 1987. Two species represented in 1987, killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) and false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), were not recorded in 1988. Two species represented in 1988 were not recorded in 1987: sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and Pacific white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*). Other species recorded in 1988 include: gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), Dall's porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*), harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*), and minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). We are certain however, that many more strandings and incidental catches occur, but are not reported. Many of the stranded animals reported here were on shore for several weeks before being found and reported, and it is likely that a large number, especially small cetaceans, get washed off shore or are damaged by scavengers before they can be found. Also, because of the isolation of most of the B.C. coastline, a large number of strandings are never found, and because the majority of the B.C. public does not know that strandings and incidental catches should be reported, other information is being lost.

NUMBER	DATE	SPECIES	LOCATION		COMMENTS *
87-23	00Jul87	Cuvier's Beaked Whale	Side Bay, VI	50°20'N 127°53'W	B,2,4,U
87-24	00May87	Dall's Porpoise	Hurst Island	50°45'N 127°30'W	C,4
87-25	00Jul87	Unidentified Balaeopterid	Side Bay, VI	50°20'N 127°52'W	C,D
88-1	07Mar88	Unidentified	Kitty Coleman, Courtonay	49°47'N 125°0'W	C,D,U
88-2	01May88	Gray Whale	Bonilla Pt., VI	48°35.6'N 124°43.0'W	C,1,9,10,U
88-3	26Mar88	Risso's Dolphin	Skidegate Inlet	53°15'N 132°0'W	B,2,4,5,10,M
88-4	08May88	Dall's Porpoise	Saanich Perm., VI	48°37.0'N 123°24.0'W	A,1,2,4,5,8,9,10,13,14,15,17,M
88-5	19May88	Gray Whale	Denman Island	49°30.0'N 124°41'W	C,1,2,4,8,9,10,13,19,M
88-6	23May88	Harbour Porpoise	Victoria, VI	48°24.5'N 123°22.0'W	C,1,2,4,5,7,8,9,10,13,14,15,17,M
88-7	25May88	Dall's Porpoise	White Rock	49°02'N 122°49'W	C,1,4,5,10,M
88-8	24May88	Gray Whale	Graham Island, QCI	53°30'N 131°50'W	C,D,U
88-9	23May88	Harbour Porpoise	Metchoin, VI	48°25.0'N 123°28.2'W	C,D,U
88-10	20Aug88	Gray Whale	Goletas Ch., VI	50°50'N 127°45'W	C,4,U
88-11	01Aug88	Humpback Whale	Bremner Island, Cape Caution	51°05'N 127°40'W	C,D,U
88-12	09Aug88	Dall's Porpoise	Victoria, VI	48°24.6'N 123°19.7'W	C,1,2,4,5,8,9,10,13,15,F
88-13	00Jul88	Harbour Porpoise	Long Beach, VI	49°3'N 125°42'W	C,D,U
88-14	29Aug88	Cuvier's Beaked Whale	Balcom Inlet, QCI	49°3'N 125°42'W	C,D,2,F
88-15	02Sep88	Harbour Porpoise	Union Bay, VI	49°35'N 124°51'W	C,1,2,4,5,8,9,10,13
88-16	29Sep88	Pacific White-Sided Dolphin	Port Hardy, VI	50°43'N 127°30'W	A,D,U
88-17	15Oct88	Harbour Porpoise	Hornby Island	49°30'N 124°40'W	A,1,2,4,5,7,8,9,10,13,15,17,M
88-18	26Jul88	Dall's Porpoise	Whale Channel	53°12'N 129°09'W	A,D,U
88-19	15Aug88	Dall's Porpoise	Whale Channel	53°12'N 129°09'W	A,D,U
88-20	15Aug88	Dall's Porpoise	Whale Channel	53°12'N 129°09'W	A,D,U
88-21	15Aug88	Dall's Porpoise	Whale Channel	53°12'N 129°09'W	A,D,U
88-22	18Aug88	Dall's Porpoise	La Perouse Bank	48°25'N 126°W	A,D,U
88-23	19Aug88	Pacific White-Sided Dolphin	La Perouse Bank	48°25'N 126°W	A,D,U
88-24	23Sep88	Harbour Porpoise	La Perouse Bank	48°25'N 126°W	A,D,U
88-25	06Dec88	Sperm Whale	Rose Pit, QCI	54°10'N 131°40'W	C,D,U
88-26	30Dec88	Minke Whale	Tiell, Graham Is.	132°N 53°15'W	C,1,4,9,10,13,15,F
88-27	00Jun88	Unidentified	Conroy Island	50°30'N 129°25'W	C,D,U
88-28	00Jun88	Large Retacean	Swordfish Bay	52°N 128°15'W	C,D,U

Table 1 - Strandings from 1988 and previously unreported strandings from 1987.

All of these records were of single stranded animals. Mass strandings, being simply two or more animals other than a mother and calf, are very infrequent on the B.C. coast.

In 1987, 22 strandings were reported (Baird et al, 1988), and three additional strandings from 1987 were reported in 1988, making a total of 24 strandings. The three new strandings from 1987 are also presented in Table 1. We expect that with an increase in public knowledge of the stranding program and the importance of reporting strandings, we will continue to add to the list of previous strandings.

Comprehensive analysis of the small number of records presented here is not possible. A further analysis of the detailed records collected in both 1987 and 1988, and of all historic stranding records available, will be made in the future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those who volunteered their time to help the Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program. Strandings and incidental catches were reported and/or data were collected by: Alert Bay Coastguard, Peter Axhom, Dean Nelson and other staff from Fisheries Vessels participating in the Cetacean Sighting Program, Mike Bigg, Bev Bluett, Rick Burns, Gary Cardinal, Dave Cove, Al Cowan, Brad Cyr, Graeme Ellis, Jerry and Janet Etkorn, Brian Faulkner, John Ford, Louise Gordon, Nigel Harrison, Gordon Hints, Grant Hughes and other staff of the Royal British Columbia Museum, Harry Kerr, M. and K. Knudsen, Bob MacDonald and other staff at the Victoria Fisheries office, the North Island Wildlife Recovery Association, David Nagorsen, Linda Nichol, Peter Olesiuk, William Reeve, Hans Reisenleiter and other Parks Canada personnel, Fred Schueler, Lance Sundquist, Ed Thorburn, Scott Trent, Dan Vedova, Peter Watts, and Nadia Wilson. Other people who assisted in data collection included: Robin Campbell, Judy Davis, Trina Foster, Lawrence and Rita Langelier, Lorne Lamoureux, Rosanna Marchetti, Jackie Moad, Samantha Statton, and Eric Walters. Neville Winchester provided storage space, Beth Sinclair identified stomach contents, and Beth Sinclair and Peter Watts aged teeth. Steve Leatherwood identified record number 87-23. We are also extremely grateful to Dr. Ron Lewis for the histopathology and toxicology analysis.

* Comments: A, incidental catch; B, live stranded, died; C, found dead; D, not recovered; 1, measurements taken; 2, photographs taken; 3, radiographs; 4, skeleton, whole/partially collected; 5, aging of teeth; 6, blood tests/cultures; 7, histology samples; 8, gross post mortem examination; 9, heavy metal toxicology analysis; 10, organochlorine tissue level analysis; 11, dioxin tissue level analysis; 12, duplicate tissue samples stored in Ottawa; 13, duplicate tissue samples stored in Nanaimo; 14, parasitology examination; 15, stomach content analysis; 16, reproduction studies; 17, DNA fingerprinting; 18, plaster cast replica of whole/part animal; 19, educational use (anatomy labs, class displays etc.); Sex F=female, M=male, U=unknown

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