

FIRST RECORD OF SOWERBY'S BEAKED WHALE FROM AZORES

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The Odontocete species *Mesoplodon bidens* (Sowerby, 1804) is generally thought to occur naturally in the northern part of the Atlantic, especially between the latitudes of 50° and 60° N. This is suggested by the known strandings on the coasts of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Germany (Baltic Sea), Holland, Belgium, British Isles and France (see Duguay and Robineau, 1982). These strandings are shown in Fig. 1. However, Maul and Sergeant (1977) refer the capture of one of these beaked whales in the waters of Madeira (near the fishing port of Machico) on August 14, 1941, which is a latitude considerably lower than the ones at which we would expect to find this species.

We report on this short note the capture of another specimen, this time in Azores. In fact, an adult female was harpooned by fishermen near Vila Franca do Campo (25° 23' N; 37° 45' W), S. Miguel Island, on September 24, 1981. According to local fishermen, three whales (possibly of the same species) were seen around the long reefs near the port, following a N-S swimming course. One of them, presented hereby, stranded on a shallow reef and was later harpooned. The others seem to have continued on their southern route.

The skeleton was removed to the "Museu Regional Dr Carlos Machado". Several difficulties have limited the amount of information we were able to obtain. From the biopsy, however, we learned that the whale was carrying a 54cm long male foetus (11/81 MRCM). Some measurements and photographs had been made on the animal, shortly after death (Table 1; Fig. 2). The skull measurements, based on Moore (1963), are shown on Table 2. Figs 3 and 4 show different views of this skull. The foetus was also measured and

TABLE 1. EXTERNAL MEASUREMENTS OF *MESOPLODON BIDENS* IN CM

Total length, from tip of upper jaw to deepest part of notch on flukes	483.0
Head length	85.0
Girth, maximum	140.0
Length of dorsal fin base	22.0
Width of flukes, tip to tip	116.0
Maximum width of flipper	50.0

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TABLE 2. SKULL MEASUREMENTS OF *MESOPLODON BIDENS* IN CM

Length of temporal fossa	9.0
Length of orbit	8.5
Greatest span of occipital condyles	11.0
Greatest width of temporal fossa approximately at right angles to greatest length	5.5
Breadth of skull across zygomatic process of squamosals	27.5
Width of premaxillae at midlength of rostrum	3.0
Breadth of skull across preorbital processes of frontals	20.2

TABLE 3. EXTERNAL MEASUREMENTS OF *MESOPLODON BIDENS* IN CM (FOETUS)

Total length, from tip of upper jaw to deepest part of notch on flukes	54.0
Tip of upper jaw to anterior insertion of dorsal fin	35.0
Tip of upper jaw to blowhole	9.3
Tip of upper jaw to apex of melon	4.5
Tip of upper jaw to centre of eye	10.0
Tip of upper jaw to angle of gape	6.0
Tip of upper jaw to anterior insertion of flipper	17.0
Height of dorsal fin	2.6
Length of flipper, axilla to tip	9.0
Maximum width of flipper	2.5
Tip of upper jaw to midpoint of genital aperture	38.2
Tip of upper jaw to midpoint of anus	41.0
Width of flukes, tip to tip	14.0

photographed (Table 3; Fig. 5).

We are very grateful to Dr James Mead, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, for his confirmation of the species identification, and to Dr Nestor de Sousa, Director of the "Museu Regional Dr Carlos Machado", for permission to the publication of the foetal measurements and other biometrical data. We also thank Silvino Pacheco and Paulo Oliveira for the photographs, and Dr A. Silva Luís for his encouragement. Manuel dos Santos provided helpful comments.

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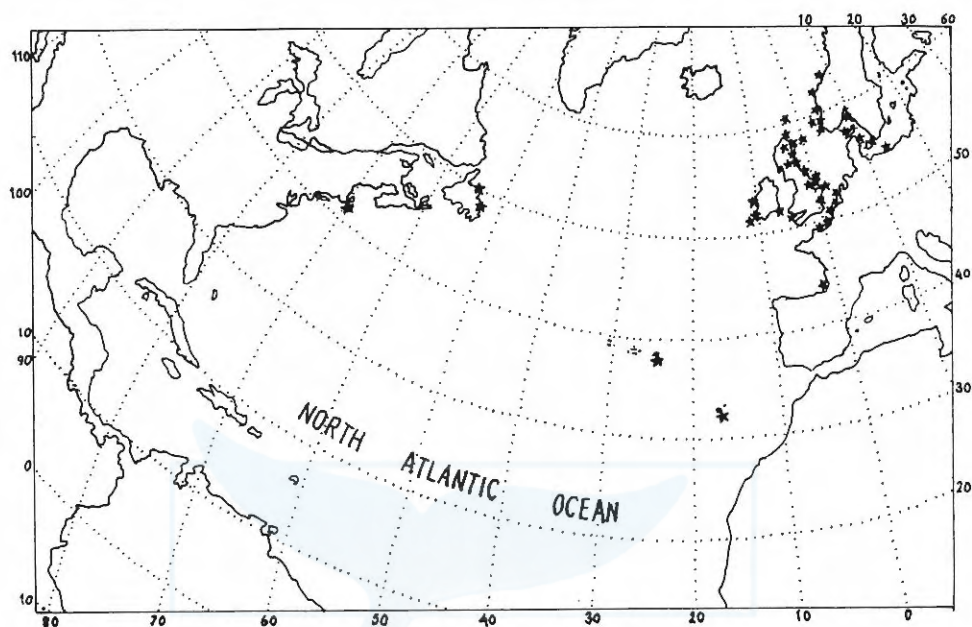


Fig. 1. Chart of known distribution of *Mesoplodon bidens* (based on Norris 1961).

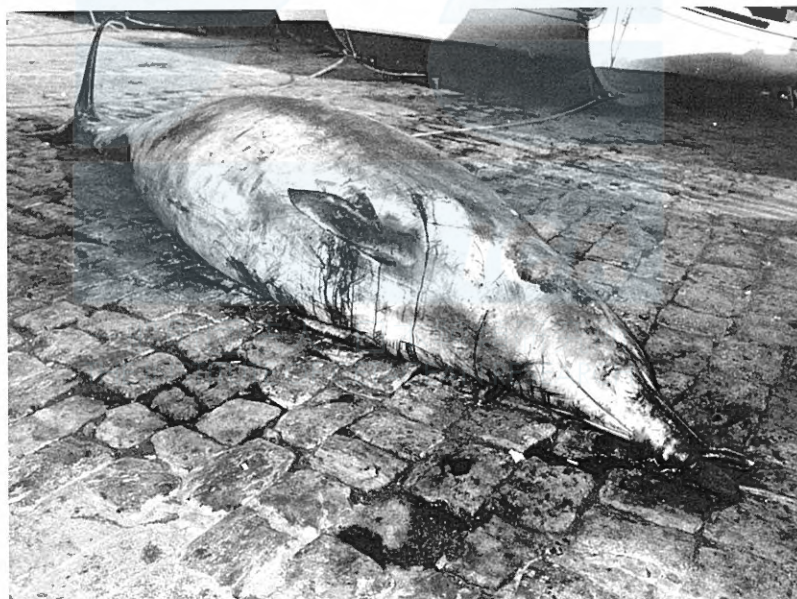


Fig. 2. Ventral view showing two grooves on the throat, characteristic of all beaked whales.

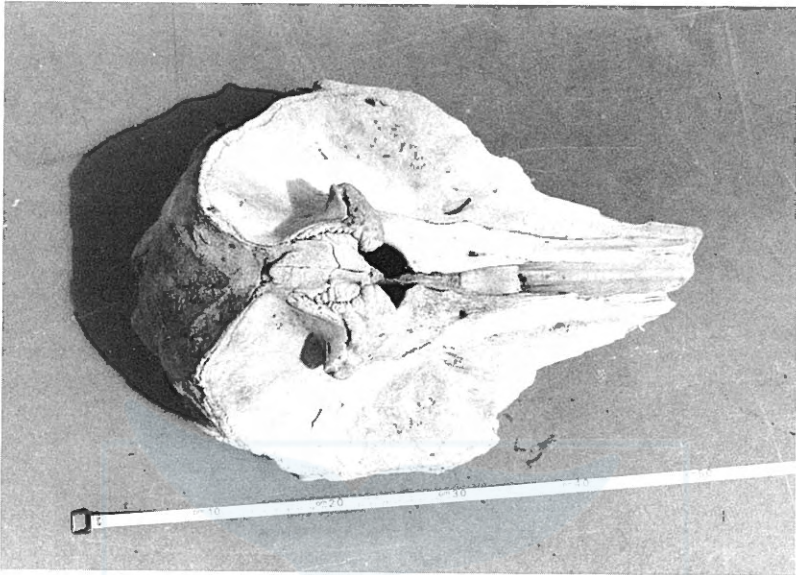


Fig. 3. Dorsal view of the skull.

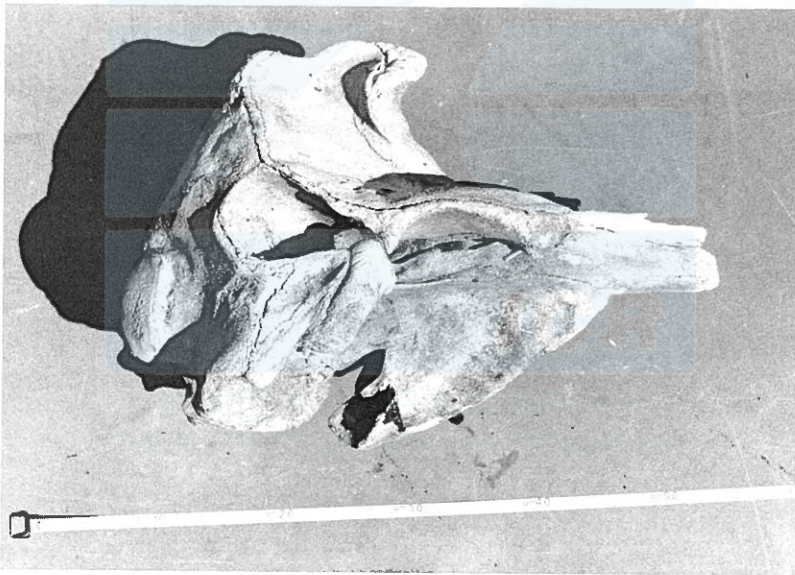


Fig. 4. Right lateral view of the skull.

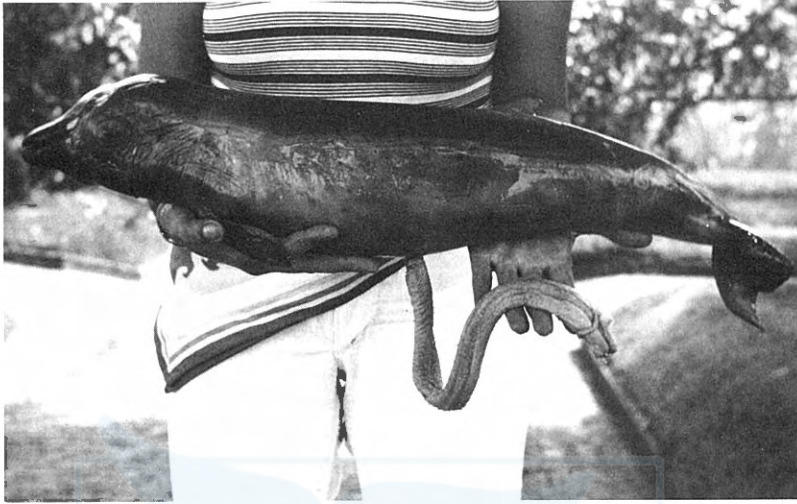


Fig. 5. Lateral view of male foetus.

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