

SOME ANOMALOUS DISPOSITIONS OF THE JACOBSON'S ORGAN IN THE FIN WHALE

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Since the beginning of the current research program at the Spanish whaling factories in 1977, nearly three hundred fin whales have been studied and the Jacobson's organ has been examined in each case because it was included in a program to collect certain basic measurements.

During the 1979 season in the whale factory of Canelinas (La Coruna, Spain) anomalous dispositions of the Stenson's orifices were observed in two occasions. As similar abnormalities in cetaceans have not been reported to our knowledge, we thought it would be interesting to describe them here.

The first observation refers to an adult male of 18.10 m long (no: Z. 79/18). In this whale, while the right orifice presented a completely normal situation the left was situated in the bottom of a fold located among the frontal baleen plates (Fig. 1).

The other whale observed was an adult male of 19 m long (no: Z. 79/24). Stenson's orifices were in the normal situation but they were duplicated and four orifices present in total. Their size was smaller (210 mm) than in other whales of similar body size (360 mm).

We could not observe any other anatomical abnormalities in these two whales. Both animals appeared to be completely healthy.

Although it is usually believed that Stenson's orifices in cetaceans are only a

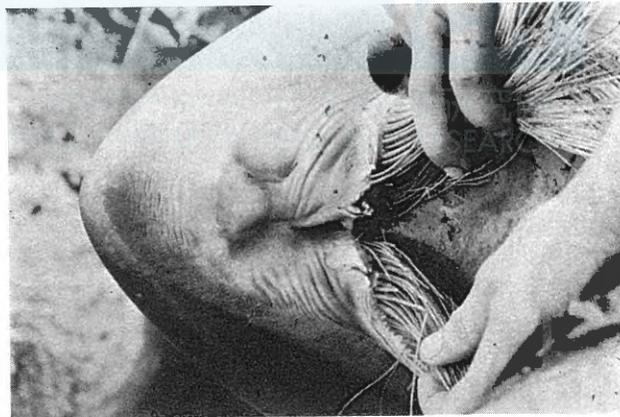


Fig. 1. Tip of the upper jaw of the fin whale (no. Z. 79/18) showing the fold where the left Stenson's duct was allocated.

vestige of a primitively more developed organ and they seem to have no function at all, but it doesn't appear that this was completely ascertained. For this reason it is impossible to say to what extent these abnormalities affect the normal life of the whales. The blubber thickness measured on the middle point of the animal's body length, at dorsal, lateral and ventral sides were 8, 6.5 and 6 cm in the first specimen and 13.5, 7 and 8 cm in the second respectively; the mean weight of the testis was 8.6 kg and 14 kg respectively. All these values, as well as a series of morphometrical results, were within the normal limits -applying the signification tests- obtained from other whales in the same season.

In conclusion, it is thought that the above mentioned abnormal dispositions of the Jacobson's organ can hardly affect the feeding and hence growth of the animals.

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