

**THE STRANDING OF TWO FALSE KILLER WHALES [*PSEUDORCA
CRASSIDENS* (OWEN)] AT POZHİKARA, NORTH OF CAPE COMORIN**

ON 27 November 1960 the fishermen at Pozhikara, a fishing village between Cape Comorin and Colachel on the west coast were surprised to find two small whales in shallow water within a few metres from the shore. Some of the enterprising young men entered the water and tried to hold on to the tail of one of them, which excitement caused both animals to run ashore and get stranded. They were hauled to a small pool at the mouth of a narrow backwater canal near the shore. The event of the capture of such strange creatures which no one could recollect seeing along that coastal stretch atleast during the past three decades, received wide publicity in the local newspapers resulting in several hundreds of people visiting Pozhikara to view the animals.

The larger of the two measuring 375 cms. died one day later, most probably due to asphyxiation as the water was apparently not of sufficient depth to allow for

its free movement, On the 30th the carcass was gifted to the S.T. Hindu College* Nagercoil, and the preparation of the skeleton of it for display has been undertaken by one of us (C.K.P.). The second animal measuring 279 cms. lived for three days and on its death it was buried Under some coconut palms as manure.

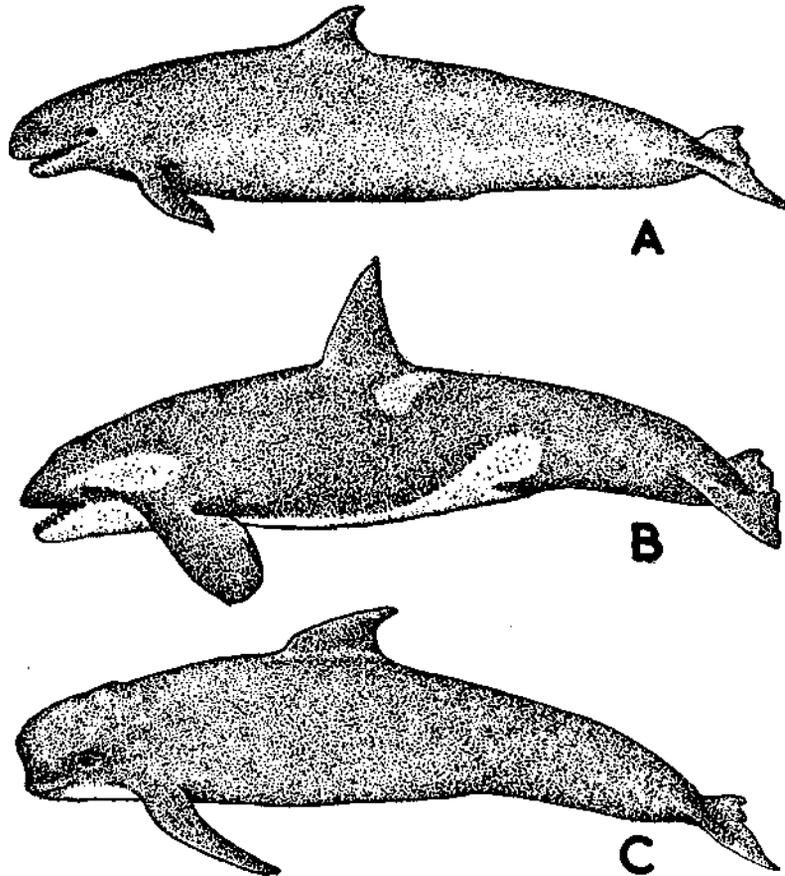
On 9 December, on hearing of these strandings one of us (E.G.S.) visited Pos&ikara and through the kind help of Mr. M. G. Jayachandra, the owner of the coconut tope, the second specimen was exhumed and although decomposition had set in it was possible to identify the remains as belonging to a male False Killer Whale, *Pseudorca crassidens* (Owen) and retrieve the almost complete skeleton of the animal.

On the 10th we were also able to exhume the larger specimen buried at the S.T. Hindu College premises (for preparing the skeleton) and identify the remains as that of a female *P. crassidens*. In this animal the mammae in the inguinal region were conspicuously bulging owing to the bloating of that part of the body due to internal decomposition which had taken place to such an extent that it was not possible to verify whether it had any embryo or foetus within. Two photographs of the animal taken when the carcass was first brought to the College on 30th November are reproduced on plate I. A few measurements of both specimens taken on the 10th are given below.

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Total length to fork of tail	2790	3750 mm
Tip of snout to origin of dorsal fin	1200	—
“ “ “ “ anal opening	—	2090
n ii i> ii °ye	312	—
•• •• II angle of mouth	288	290
II ii •• II anterior insertion of flipper	530	680
.....i blow-hole	356	—
Width of blow-hole	47	—
Length of flipper from anterior insertion to tip	340	380
Width of flipper	129	—
Eye to anterior insertion of flipper	215	370
Depth of body at anal opening	340	—
Depth of body mid-way between anal opening and base of caudal flukes	280	—
Anal opening to fork of caudal flukes	600	:-
Length of one half of caudal fluke from fork	295	—
Anal opening to genital orifice	160	—
Length of contracted penis	175	—
Diameter of mammae at base	—	75
Distance separating the two mammae	•• ..	70

The False Killer is a truly oceanic species with a cosmopolitan distribution. Only twice has it been reported from the Indian coast and the first record refers to a 513 cm. (16' 10") specimen stranded on 14 February, 1902 on the beach in the neighbourhood of Trivandrum (Ferguson and Lydekker, 1903). The second record refers to two immature specimens, a male and a female caught in fishing nets 10 miles north of Trivandrum (Dawson, 1911). The only other records of *P. crassidens* from this region are that of three schools stranded on the Ceylon coast reported by Pearson (1931) and Deraniyagala (1945). While its occurrence in these waters may be considered to be a rarity, one feature peculiar to the False Killer is its movements in large schools often numbering several hundreds and also its tendency to get stranded in such large numbers, several such strandings being listed by Fraser (1948). In this connection it may be interesting to mention here that on or about 27 November local newspapers reported two other strandings involving small sized

whales, one at Ovari on the east coast between Cape Comorin and Thiruchendur and the second a few miles north of Alleppey on the west coast. Although it has not been possible to verify the identity of the species involved in these two strandings, the incidents bear recording, if for nothing else, at least to draw attention to the strandings at three places of small-sized whales along a coastal stretch of about 300 Km. within a few days apart.



Drawings of (A) *Pseudorca crassidens* (Owen); (B) *Orcinus orca* (Linnaeus); and (C) *Globicephala melaena* (Traill) (After Fraser, 1948).

Previous strandings of the False Killer have shown notable differences in the sizes of the individuals constituting a school, but both the sexes have been noticed to occur in almost equal numbers, and as such the stranding of a male and female at Pozhikara may be only mere coincidence. There is no evidence of this species showing any periodicity of migration to inshore waters for breeding and it has been suggested that some of the mass strandings of the False Killer may be on account of changes in the distribution of water masses and consequently the alteration of the distribution of the animals on which they feed. Once getting close to the breaker-zone in the calmer inshore waters, they are liable to be stranded. The



Female False Killer Whale, *Pseudorca crassidens* (Owen) 375 cms long stranded at Pozhikara north of Cape Comorin.

size of the specimens indicate the male had not attained sexual maturity which the species is said to reach when it is 3.65 to 4.25 metres long (Fraser, 1948). The False Killer is not known to exceed six metres in length and the adult male is on the average about 60 cms. longer than the female.

Although distinct in several characteristics, *P. crassidens* is liable to be confused with two other smaller whales, namely, the Killer Whale *Orcinus orca* (Linnaeus), and the Indian Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhyncha* Gray, all belonging to the family Delphinidae, and have been reported from strandings from the Indian coast. The characters such as the robust body ; gently sloping snout which does not surpass the tip of the lower jaw ; paddle-like large flippers with rounded margins ; more or less high triangular dorsal fin ; and the marked colour of black and white belly, white patches one above eye on side of head and another behind base of dorsal on upper side of body of *O. orca*, and the conspicuously bulbous head and long tapering flipper which is about one-fifth to one-seventh the body length (*versus* one-eighth to one-tenth in *P. crassidens*) of *G. macrorhyncha* should help in easily distinguishing them from *P. crassidens*. Drawings of *P. crassidens*, *O. orca*, and *G* melaena*, the last closely allied to *G. macrorhyncha* are given in figure 1 to facilitate comparison.

This third definite record of the False Killer after a lapse of about 50 years not very distant from its first two recorded location on the Indian coast (Trivandrum is about 60 Km. north of Pozhikara) is of interest.

We take this opportunity to thank Mr. V. Paravaikkarasu Pillay and Mr. N. Sreenivasan of the S. T. Hindu College for the photographs reproduced here ; Mr. M. J. Jayachandra, Secretary, Fishermen's Co-operative Society, Pozhikara, and Messrs. Vincent, Charles A. Roach, and Peter of Pozhikara for the gift of the specimens and for help in the field.

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