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A REPORT ON THE WHALES SIGHTED OFF MANDAPAM ON THE PALK BAY SIDE ON 5th JULY, 1988*

On 5-7-1988, at about 1030 hrs, Mr. T.S. Balasubramanian, the Deputy Commander, Coast Guard Station, Mandapam, informed that a couple of whales were seen swimming in the Mandapam Bay in front of the Coast Guard Station, and that the Station could arrange a boat trip for-on-the spot observation by the Scientists of the Regional Centre of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Mandapam Camp.

The surfacing of whales at frequent intervals was seen in the Bay, at about 2.5-3 km away from the shore. Observations at a closer distance onboard revealed the presence of three whales, one larger and two smaller. The blowing behaviour was observed only a couple of times; the blow was rather feeble and only of a moderate height. During surfacing, the body appeared to be slender, overall colour of the exposed upper surface being black. The fin appeared to be narrow, concave on its outer margin and tapering. The tail fluke was with concave margin. Often two animals were seen swimming close together. They surfaced only for a short duration of less than a minute. The eye estimation of the size of the larger whale was about 4-5 m and that of the smaller ones, 2.5-3 m.

During the observation period between 1100 and 1200 hrs, the whales were seen in relatively shallower waters (5-6 m depth), nearer the shore, but later, they were found gradually moving to deeper areas and away from the shore.

* Reported by P. Vedavyasa Rao, P. Livingston and Atmaram Misra, Mandapam Regional Centre of CMFRI, Mandapam Camp.

It was reported that the whales were first sighted in the area on 4-7-1988 afternoon, and they remained in this area until the afternoon of 5-7-'88. According to fishermen fishing in the area, there were four whales.

On the basis of the observed characteristics such as the body form, colour, nature of the fin, fluke and general surfacing and diving behaviour, it was inferred that the present whales might belong to the species *Pseudorca crassidens* Owen, popularly known as False killer whale.

Although the species is oceanic in habit and moves in shoals, it is known that these whales, on several occasions, move to shallow areas and get stranded or trapped. In the present case also, it appears that a few specimens might have got separated from the main shoal and moved to the shallow waters of the Bay.

From the Indian waters, *P. crassidens* (False killer whale) is reported from Calicut, Trivandrum, Pozhikara (Kanyakumari District), Cape Comorin, Tiruchendur and Madras. The present sighting of this species off Mandapam in the Palk Bay is the first report.

The great interest evinced by the Officers and staff of the Coast Guard Station, Mandapam and the excellent facilities afforded by the Station to the scientists to make the above observation are gratefully acknowledged.

