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958 Stranding of spinner dolphins and a whale along Tuticorin coast

On 21.9.99 one spinner dolphin *Stenella longirostris* Gray was accidentally caught at Tharuvaikulam by 'Mural Valai' (a small drift gill net) operated off Vaipar at a depth of 10-12m. The specimen was a male measuring 1.1m and weighing approximately 20kg (Fig.1)

Again on 30.9.99 one more dolphin of the same kind measuring 1.38m weighing roughly 30kg was also accidentally caught by podivalai operated off Tuticorin at a depth of 12-15m. Morphometric measurements of both the specimens are presented in Table-1.

On 5.2.2000, a photograph of stranded whale



Fig. 1: *Stenella longirostris* (Spinner dolphin) accidentally caught at Tharuvaikulam on 21.9.1999.

has appeared in a local Tamil daily 'Dinamalar' informing about a whale washed ashore near Kayalpatnam coast. The specimen was totally putrified and part of its skeleton was partially exposed especially neural arches, thoracic ribs which were intact partially. Few of the skeletal parts were found missing. Part of cranium and maxillar bones were fallen and lying 30m away from the specimen. Hardly 20% flesh was seen on the entire body, remaining were decayed naturally and removed off either by incessant wave action or eaten by animals.

As such from the putrified condition of the specimen it was inferred that the marine mammal might have died over a month ago, off Kayalpatnam. Subsequently, drifted towards Kayalpatnam coast in advanced decomposed state and washed ashore during second week of February, 2000. The specimen was roughly measuring about 13.5m in length, the jaw bones were measuring 1.9m and part of cranium has 4.5m depth in size. The exact identification could not be established due to lack of striking external morphological characters.

TABLE I Morphometric measurements (cm) of *Stenella longirostris* stranded at Tharuvaikulam and Tuticorin

	1	2
Total length	110	138
Snout to origin of dorsal	43	67.5
Snout to eye	17	29
Snout to blow hole	24	30
Snout to origin of flipper	35	40
Length of upper jaw	16	19
Length of lower jaw	16	18.5
Eye diameter	1.5	2.5
Inter Orbital distance	24	25
Snout to genital opening	71	93
Snout to anal opening	81	101
Girth at dorsal	55	64
Girth at caudal	22	30
Girth at flipper	43	56
Number of teeth on upper jaw	51+50	49+49
Number of teeth on lower jaw	50+51	50+49
Dorsal base, height, and inner curvature	15,19,9	17,21,11
Flipper base, height and inner curvature	7,18,13	13,23,15
Length of caudal fluke (end to end)	24	30
Sex	Male	Male
Approximate weight	20kg	30kg

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