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केन्द्रीय समुद्री मात्स्यिकी CENTRAL MARINE FISHERIES  
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## ON A BLUE WHALE, *BALAENOPTERA MUSCULUS* STRANDED AT CHELLANAM, COCHIN \*

Stranding of whales has been reported from different parts of the Indian coast and islands from time to time. The blue whale, *Balaenoptera musculus*, is occasionally stranded along both the coasts. It is the bulkiest living animal on earth and is known to attain a length of about 30 m and weight of upto 150 t with a longevity of about 80 years. So far 13 instances of blue whale strandings have been reported from different parts of Indian coasts since 1943.

On 2nd May 1993, a large whale was stranded at Chellanam, Cochin (Fig. 1). The fishermen reported that the carcass drifted from south to north and beached. The carcass was putrified and the jaw bones (mandibles) were separated from body (Fig 2). The whale bones were not found either on the jaws or in the stranding area. A long piece of drift gill net webbing along with rope was found in the tail portion. From the condition of putrification it was evident that the death of the whale had occurred 4-6 days before it was stranded. It is quite possible that the struggling whale might have got entangled in the drift gill net operated for fishing. In order to retrieve the gear the fishermen might have cut off that portion of the net which got entangled with the whale.

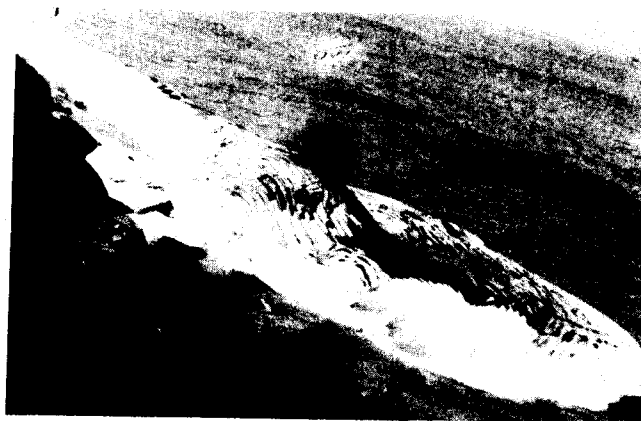


Fig. 1. The carcass of the blue whale beached at Chellanam, Cochin.

The total length of the whale was about 26 m with an approximate weight of 80 t. There were about 70 - 80 throat grooves extending upto umbelicus (Fig. 3). The dorsal fin was characteristically small, relative to the size of the animal and placed far behind nearer to the caudal fluke. the length of the flipper was 2.9 m (11% of total length). It was not possible to determine the sex of the whale from putrified carcass. The lower jaw bone measured 5.9 m (23% of the total length). From the above characters the stranded

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Fig. 2. The jaw bone (manibel) of the stranded whale.

whale was identified as a rorqual belonging to the species *Balaenoptera musculus* of the family Balaenopteridae. Based on the available literature on blue whale strandings from Indian waters, it is ascertained that the present specimen stranded at Chellanam may be the largest reported so far from the region.



Fig. 3. The characteristic throat grooves of *Balaenoptera musculus*.

The blue whale is distributed in Arctic, Antarctic, Pacific and Indian Ocean and occurs in more numbers north of 35°N. Its numbers are greatly reduced in the world oceans due to hunting. Generally, the blue whales are stranded in the Indian region during December-May period and often the carcasses are washed ashore.