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10. ON THE RECOVERY OF A FOETUS FROM A SPERM WHALE *PHYSETER MACROCEPHALUS*
LINNAEUS STRANDED AT CHETLAT ISLAND, LAKSHADWEEP

Though James and Panicker (1990) listed the strandings of the sperm whale 17 times from the Indian Seas no foetus was found in any of them. Usually sperm whales stranded are cut open to see whether any ambergris is present. This is the first time that a foetus was found in the body of a sperm whale stranded from the Indian Seas.

On 15-8-1990 a female specimen of 9.5 m length with body girth of 12 m was stranded at the Southern extremity of Chetlat Island in the Lakshadweep group of Islands. Earlier sperm whales have been stranded thrice at Chetlat Island (James and Panicker, op. cit.). The foetus was a female measuring 3.5 m in length and 2.3 m in girth and was laying in an abnormal position inside the uterus and this could have probably caused the death and subsequent stranding of the whale.

According to Berzin (1972) calving is almost round the year in sperm whale and the gestation period is 11-12 months. The largest embryos varied in length from 4.6 to 6.0 m and the smallest sucklings varied in length from 3.7 to 5.6 m. Average length at the time of birth is 4.0 to 4.2 m. Judging from the size of the present foetus we can say that it was near time.

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