

ON A HUMPBAC DOLPHIN *SOUSA CHINENSIS* IN CAPTIVITY

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A dolphin *Sousa chinensis* measuring 2.3 m was accidentally got entangled in a gill net set off Calicut on 12-2-1981. Subsequently, it was released in a polythene lined pond, 20 x 10 x 1.5 m, filled with sea water. The water temperature of the pond ranged from 27°C to 31°C.

It had sustained multiple injuries on the neck, flippers, dorsal fin and caudal fluke while handled by the fishermen. Five intramuscular injections of Neomycin (20 lakhs) were administered on alternate days and Loraxine cream was applied on the wounds. The dolphin responded well to the treatment.

The dolphin was actively swimming when released in the pond (fig. 1), but became sluggish after two days, coming to the edge of the pond and resting. Meanwhile, a few blisters developed on its back due to the continuous exposure to the sun. However, after the sixth day it started swimming and diving again exposing its dorsal fin and hump in the characteristic manner. The blisters also disappeared gradually.

While swimming, it often spinned on its axis or jumped vertically above the water. It was seen playing with the floating objects like bamboo reapers, plastic pieces or coir rope. It flicked the floating materials with its beak and brought them to the edge of the pond. When sand grains were dropped in the water, about 10 m away, it seemed to get frightened, swimming away with a 'shiver' and avoiding the area of disturbance for a while.

When the dolphin was active, it was observed to breathe once in 30 seconds. But when it became sluggish after 20 days of captivity, the frequency of breathing decreased to once in 40-45 seconds. During this period it was observed to rest at the bottom of the pond, coming to the surface vertically for breathing.

The dolphin was offered fresh oilsardine, live mullet and sepia, in the morning and evening. It showed dislike for food by swimming away from it or splashing the water with caudal fluke. Various reasons are attributed to this behaviour (Gaskin 1972). The most accepted view is the 'psychic stress' due to the change in the environment; shock received by it during the capture and transport are also cited as reason.

Owing to prolonged starvation the dolphin became weak and emaciated. Attempts made on 24th day for force-feeding, by opening the mouth carefully and keeping the fresh oilsardine at the back of the tongue, also did not help in improving the condition. The dolphin continued to rest at the bottom of the pond without swimming and it died after 28 days of its captivity.

On autopsy, the fat layer was found to be completely absent; stomach and intestine were empty. The skin was wrinkled. The cause of death may be starvation followed by dehydration.

GASKIN, D. E. 1972. *Whales, dolphins and seals*. Heinemann Educational Book London.