

Whale shark landings in Uttar Kannada, Karnataka

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The whale shark, *Rhincodon typus* Smith, 1828, has a circumglobal distribution in tropical and warm temperate seas. Since May 2003 it has been included under Appendix II of CITES, making the trade of this species regulated. The status of this species has since then been upgraded from “Data deficient” in 1996 to “Vulnerable” in 2000 by the IUCN. Currently it is protected under Schedule I Part II of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1972.

Two instances of the landing of whale sharks have been observed in the Uttar Kannada District in the 2007-09 period. Both landings were recorded in the month of January, with one on 27.01.07 at Baithkol, Karwar and the second at Gabitwada near Ankola on 31.01.09. The specimen landed at Baithkol (Fig. 1) was brought in by fishers who found it entangled in a bottom set gillnet at approximately 45 m depth off Karwar Lighthouse. It was dragged to

Table 1. Morphometric parameters of whale shark specimen landed in Uttar Kannada (2007-09)

Morphometric measurements (cm)	Jan 2007		Jan 2009	
	(cm)	(% TL)	(cm)	(% TL)
Total length (TL)	259.1	100	427	100
Standard length	Not recorded		320	74.9
Head length	„		72	16.9
Snout to first dorsal	„		183	42.9
Snout to second dorsal	„		259	60.7
Snout to pectoral	„		82	19.2
Snout to pelvic	„		196	45.9
Snout to anal	„		220	51.5
Length of first dorsal fin	33.02	12.7	45	10.5
Base length of first dorsal fin	25.4	9.8	Not recorded	
Length of second dorsal fin	20.32	7.8	„	
Base length of second dorsal fin	10.16	3.9	„	
Length of pectoral fin from angle of inner base to tip	50.8	19.6	69	16.2
Pectoral fin base length	Not recorded		37	8.7
Length of pelvic fin	„		19	4.5
Pelvic fin base length	„		15	3.5
Eye diameter	„		5	6.9 (% HL)
Inter orbital space	„		80	18.7
Gill slits	05		05	
Ribbings	Not recorded		08	

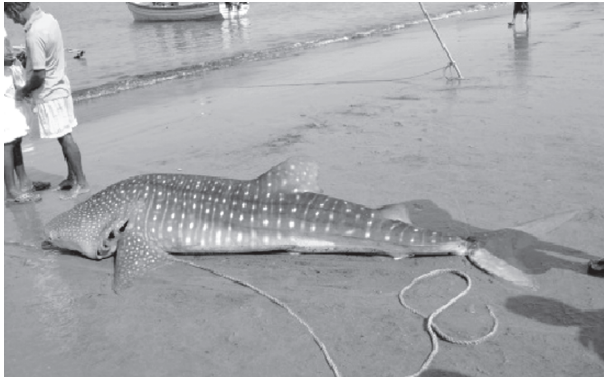


Fig. 1. Juvenile whale shark (*Rhincodon typus* Smith, 1828) landed at Baithkol beach on 27th January 2007

the Baithkol beach by boat with a nylon rope tied to its caudal peduncle, leading to a sharp cut, resulting in a wound. The whale shark, though alive, was bleeding from its mouth. The fishers were aware that the fish could not be marketed. With persuasion by the CMFRI staff, who also cautioned them that it was illegal to catch this species, it was released back into the sea.

As per the fishers of Gabitwada, the second whale shark was also found entangled in a gillnet. It was also brought to the shore by dragging by the tail resulting in a deep cut on the caudal peduncle. An attempt was made to market the fish but the effort was abandoned once the fishers became aware that catching the said fish was an offence. According to some fishers of the area there exists a market for its fins and flesh, though not locally.

Both the specimen captured were juveniles. The claspers of the specimen landed in Gabitwada did not extend beyond the anterior margin of the pelvic fin.

So far the majority of landings of the whale shark on the west coast have been from December to April. Two earlier landings of whale sharks at Karwar were on 17.01.81 (at Anjadip Island, female of total length of 8.1 m) and on 18.03.83 (at Karwar beach, total length 5.35 m). The present occurrences of whale sharks fall within this season. Telemetric studies could yield better data of the migration of whale sharks in the Arabian Sea.