

## The first stranding report of *Peponocephala electra*



*Peponocephala electra*, commonly known as the melon-headed whale, is a member of the family Delphinidae and primarily inhabits the deeper waters of the continental slope, and the shelf surrounding oceanic islands, located far from the shore. However, they can also be found in certain near-shore areas where the coastline is approached by deep water (Wang *et al.*, 2001). These species have a wide distribution across tropical and subtropical oceanic waters, spanning from 40° N to 35° S (Jefferson and Barros, 1997; Perryman and Danil, 2018). In the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, they are documented as a rare species of cetaceans (Vivekanandan and Jeyabaskaran, 2012). It possesses

a moderately robust body, exhibiting a streamlined shape. The head of the melon-headed whale is triangular and sharply pointed, resembling a bulbous shape. Its faint cape extends below the tall and falcate dorsal fin. Another notable feature is the white lip present on the lower jaw. The body of *Peponocephala electra* is predominantly colored in charcoal gray to black hues. Additionally, there is a distinct white urogenital patch on the body, which serves as a contrasting marking against the dark background. The flippers of the melon-headed whale are sickle-shaped with sharply pointed tips (Ratheesh Kumar *et al.*, 2022). On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, an extraordinary live stranding event of

a melon-headed whale occurred at Muthala Pozhi, near Alappuzha beach in the state of Kerala. The animal was found in distress but still alive and immediately caught the attention of local fishermen and other members of the public, who immediately responded to the situation and worked together to rescue the stranded animal, recognizing the urgency. This stranding event is of considerable importance as it marks the first recorded instance of a melon-headed whale stranding on the southwest coast of the Indian mainland. In the entire Indian scenario, stranding of this species is rare, and previous stranding records have been reported by Owen (1866) from Tamil Nadu, Blanford (1891) from the Palk Strait, Leatherwood *et al.* (1991) from Car Nicobar Island, Karuppiyah *et al.* (1998) from Tamil Nadu, the Marine Mammal Research and Conservation Network of India (2020) from the Lakshadweep Islands and a live stranding followed by a subsequent dead stranding of the same individual of this species have been observed at Gorai Beach in Mumbai (Nav Shakthi, 2022). Moreover, the rarity of the occurrence of this species from the Indian coast is emphasized by a single sighting event reported by Leatherwood *et al.* (1991) from Visakhapatnam. The uncommonness of both stranding and sighting records of the species underscores the significance of this report on the stranding event. Overall, this live stranding of a melon-headed whale serves as a reminder of the importance of vigilance, collaboration, and proactive efforts to safeguard marine life and their habitats.

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