

Krait

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SPERM WHALE *PHYSETER MACROCEPHALUS* LINNAEUS STRANDING ON THE KANNUR COAST, KERALA STATE, INDIA

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A dead Whale was washed ashore at Keezhunna Kadappuram, about 8km south of Kannur town on 08.ii.2007. From the peculiar barrel-shaped huge head, long rod-shaped lower jaw and the corrugated nature of the body, it was identified as Sperm Whale, *Physeter macrocephalus* Linnaeus. The specimen was an adult female measuring about 9m in length. The local fishermen reported that the whale got stranded and died during a high tide the previous night. The fresh external wounds on the flipper, dorsal side of body and caudal regions, with blood oozing out, suggest the possibility of the whale having got hit with a large fishing boat or ship.

The stranded locality is close to the mouth of Dharmadam river and the coastal waters of this area is relatively shallow. The Green Island (Dharmadam thuruthu), a small island in the littoral area of the coast, is situated about 7km south of the stranding site. The coastal waters around this island is well known for sightings of Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and Hump-backed Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*). Interestingly, there have also been several individual strandings of cetacean species reported around this coast in the past (Mohan, 1999; Palot, 2005; Cheruvat *et al.*, 2006). Stranded Sperm Whales have also been reported from Pondicherry and Gujarat (K. Sathasivam, in litt. 29.ix.2007)

Physeter macrocephalus is a circumglobal species frequenting deep waters. Along the Indian ocean, it is reported from India (Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chennai, Karwar, Kollam, Krusadi Islands, Lakshadweep Islands and Mahabalipuram), Pakistan (Sind and Baluchistan coasts) and Sri Lanka (James & Panicker, 1994; Agrawal & Alfred, 1999).

The Sperm Whale is legally protected under Schedule II of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 and from International Trade under Appendix-I of CITES. International Whaling Commission protects this species from whaling since 1986.

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