



SPECIES FACT SHEET –

Cuvier's Beaked Whale ***(Ziphius cavirostris)***



Photo © Natacha Aguilar de Soto

Measurements

Length

Newborn: 2.7 m

Full grown: c. 7 m

Weight

Newborn: 250-300 kg

Full grown: Up to 3,000 kg

Identification

At Sea

Sloping, slightly bulbous forehead with short beak. Pale head and darker body often covered in scars. Body robust. Small dorsal fin located about two-thirds along the back. Low diffuse blow, often directed slightly forward.

On Land

Single pair of conical teeth situated at the tip of lower jaw, erupting in males which protrude forward from the mouth. Teeth may be infested with stalked barnacles. Relatively short and broad skull.

Description

Head

Cuvier's beaked whales have a smoothly sloping head becoming slightly bulbous with age, a short, poorly defined beak and upcurving mouthline, and a pair of V-shaped throat grooves. They have a darker crescent shape around the eyes. The distance between the snout and the blowhole is short, with a slight concavity on top of the head.

Body, Fin & Markings

Colouration is variable: most commonly brownish grey but sometimes blue-grey, paler grey or even white head and upper back (particularly in older individuals). Often there are linear scars on the back and sides. There are cream or white oval blotches on the sides and lower belly. There may be an orangish-yellow film over the body caused by diatoms. They have small narrow flippers with a pointed tip which may be tucked into "flipper pockets". The dorsal fin varies from small, triangular to relatively large and tall. The tail flukes are concave, lacking a median notch.

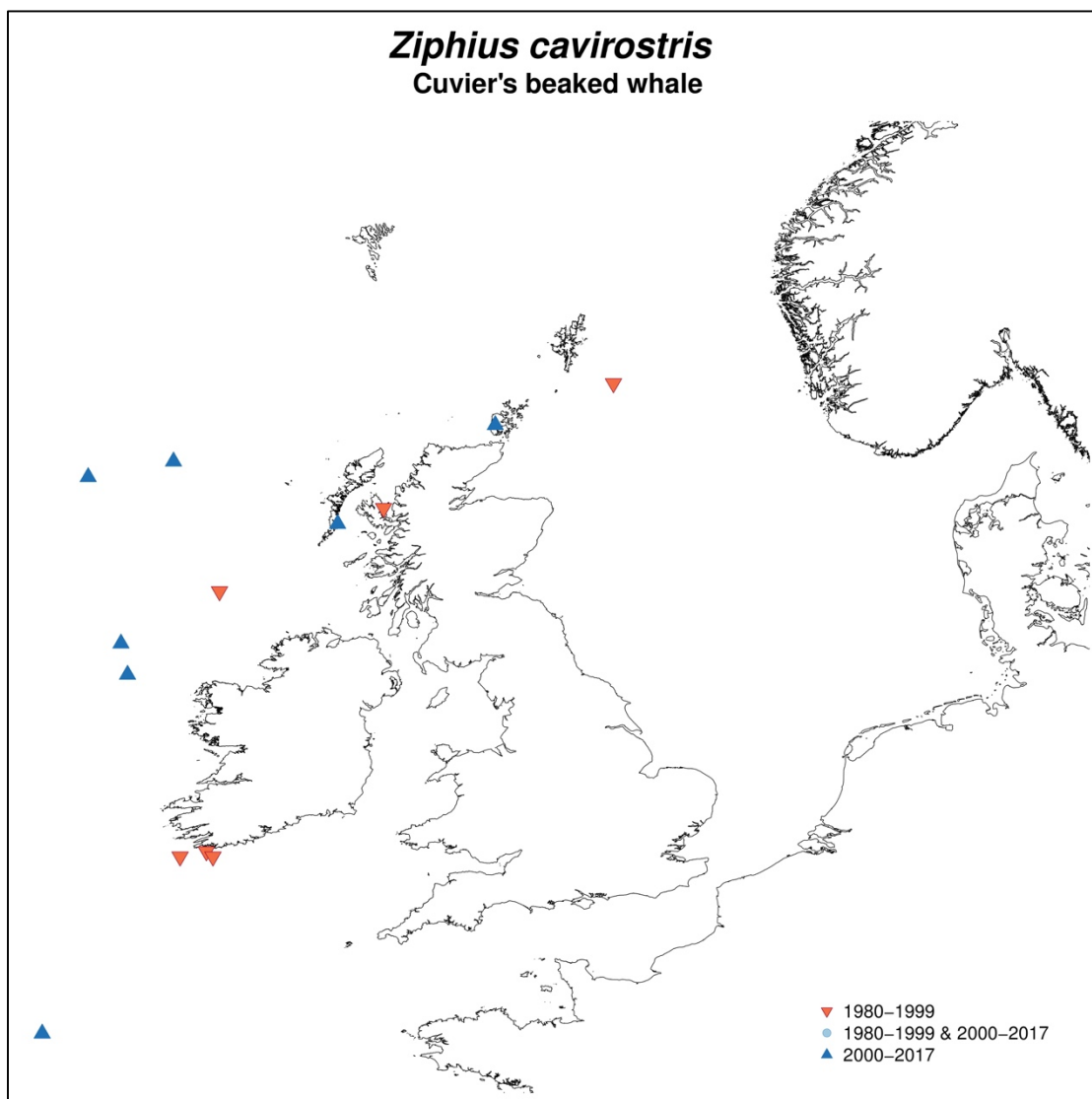
Distribution

Global Distribution

Cuvier's beaked whales are widely distributed in deep waters of all tropical and warm temperate seas including the Mediterranean Sea.

European Waters

It is the most common beaked whale in southern Europe, off the Iberian Peninsula, in the Bay of Biscay, and the Mediterranean. It is rarely sighted further north and east with isolated extralimital records from Iceland, Sweden and The Netherlands. It is a regular inhabitant of the waters around the Azores, Madeira and Canaries where observed year-round.



Cuvier's beaked whale sightings around British Isles (Source: Evans & Waggitt, 2020)

UK & Ireland

There are only a handful of sightings records in the British Isles and Ireland. However, there have been one hundred strandings on the coasts of Britain and Ireland over the last 100 years (two-thirds since early 1960s), predominantly occurring on the Atlantic coasts and mainly in late winter or spring. The few sightings have occurred mainly in July.

Abundance

The frequency of sightings in some regions suggest that Cuvier's beaked whales may be fairly abundant in preferred habitat; however, there are no abundance estimates for the species in Europe.

Habitat

The species is predominantly found in deep waters, favouring continental or island slopes at depths of 500-3,000 m, and preferring warm temperate to tropical seas. Some populations appear to have high levels of site fidelity.

Diet

Cuvier's beaked whales feed primarily on a variety of deep-sea squid species, but sometimes also crustaceans and fish.

Behaviour

Not well known. Cuvier's beaked whales are not often seen, most sightings being of single individuals or small groups of 2-12. Social organisation is unknown; however, the scarring observed on their bodies indicates intraspecific aggression. They are deep divers with a record of 2,992 metres depth and 137.5 min duration. They are known to lie motionless on the surface of the water in calm weather, but may also sometimes breach completely out of the water.

Life History

Very poorly known. Sexual maturity is thought to occur around 11 years of age, at 580 cm length in females and 550 cm in males. The oldest aged individual was a 30-year old female and 36-year old male but it is likely that they have a longer life span.

Conservation Threats

The greatest anthropogenic threat is the susceptibility of the species to impacts from high-intensity sounds, particularly mid-frequency (2-10 kHz) sonar. Mass strandings have been associated with naval sonar exercises off Greece, the Canary Islands, Bahamas, Madeira, and Guam. There have been a few cases of ship strikes and some animals have been entangled in fishing gear. Little direct hunting is believed to take place. They are legally protected in European, British and Irish waters.

IUCN status: Least Concern.

References

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