



SPECIES FACT SHEET –

Dwarf Sperm Whale

(Kogia sima)



Photo © Marine Discovery

Measurements**Length**

Newborn: 1 m

Full grown: 2.5-2.7 m

Weight

Newborn: c. 14 kg

Full grown: Up to 280 kg

Identification***At Sea***

Very similar in appearance to pygmy sperm whale with squarish head and small robust body. However, its dorsal fin is larger and more erect, and located closer to the middle of the back. Brownish-grey in colour over the back and flanks with a white or pinkish belly. Generally no visible blow. If only back and fin seen, reminiscent of harbour porpoise. Difficult to spot except in very calm seas.

On Land

Head shape and “false gills” give shark-like appearance, similar to pygmy sperm whale, but smaller in size. There is usually a pair of short throat grooves, similar to beaked whales. 7-12 (rarely up to 13) pairs of sharp pointed teeth in lower jaw; sometimes up to 3 pairs also in upper jaw.

Description***Head***

It has a triangular, squarish head with a narrow underslung lower jaw. There are short ill-defined crescent-shaped grooves in the throat region, which give the superficial appearance of gills. The blowhole is situated on the top of the head, about <10% from the tip of the snout. The lower jaw carries 10-16 pairs of sharp pointed teeth. It has an oil-filled spermaceti organ above the skull behind a large melon of fatty tissue.

Body, Fin & Markings

The dorsal fin is 9-16% of snout to fin length and located in middle of the back, giving a dolphin-like appearance. The body is small, robust, brownish-grey in colour over the back and flanks with a white or pinkish belly. The flippers are small with bluntish tips and situated near to the head. As with pygmy sperm whale, the tail has a concave trailing edge with a distinct median notch.

Distribution

Global Distribution

The species has worldwide distribution but appears to be more confined to tropical and sub-tropical seas. Its range is known predominantly from strandings. In the North Atlantic, the species has been recorded from equatorial waters to Virginia (USA) in the west and the British Isles in the east.

European Waters

Dwarf sperm whales have been sighted off the coast of Portugal. There have been only seven other records elsewhere in Europe, mainly strandings - five from France, one from Spain and one from the United Kingdom.

UK & Ireland

In British and Irish waters, there has been only one confirmed live sighting which came ashore in Cornwall in October 2011, but fortunately was re-floated and swam away

Abundance

The species is poorly known and no abundance estimates exist, although it is thought to be relatively uncommon. Due to their cryptic nature, they are probably under-recorded.

Habitat

Dwarf sperm whales typically prefer warm waters, with evidence suggesting that they have a pelagic distribution, feeding in deep waters generally beyond the continental shelf.

Diet

They feed primarily on mid- and deep-water cephalopods as well as fish and meopelagic crustaceans (favouring the families Histioteuthidae and Cranchiidae).

Behaviour

Not well known. They are usually observed individually or in small groups usually less than six but occasionally up to 16 animals, suggesting that they are not very social. However, low food density may also contribute to small group size. Aerial behaviour is only very rarely seen. Dwarf sperm whales when seen at sea, usually appear slow and sluggish and most observations have occurred in very calm conditions with animals typically resting motionless at the sea surface.

Life History

Although data are limited, research from South Africa suggests that dwarf sperm whales reach sexual maturity at 3-5 years. They have a gestation period of 11-12 months with a maximum life span of approximately 22 years.

Conservation Threats

The conservation status of dwarf sperm whale is currently considered as data deficient by IUCN. Due to their cryptic nature, it is believed that these whales face relatively few impacts from humans. There have been recent reports of dwarf sperm whales being harvested for human consumption within the Philippines, with locals using dynamite and machetes. Although reports of bycatch from fishing are rare, there is evidence to suggest that fatalities have occurred due to the ingestion of ocean debris such as plastic. Ship strikes occur occasionally and are likely due to the whales' tendency to lie motionless on the surface of the water. The species is legally protected in European, British and Irish waters

IUCN status: Data Deficient.

References

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