



SPECIES FACT SHEET –

Gervais' Beaked Whale ***(Mesoplodon europaeus)***



Photo © Sergio Hanquet

Measurements

Length

Newborn: 2.1 m

Full grown: 4.2-4.8 m

Weight

Newborn: c. 81 kg

Full grown: 600-1,200 kg

Identification

At Sea

Rarely seen at sea, and difficult to distinguish from other *Mesoplodon* spp., particularly True's beaked whale. Spindle shaped body, small head and small triangular dorsal fin two-thirds along back. Most diagnostic feature is short but clearly defined slender beak, and relatively straight mouthline.

On Land

Back usually a uniform dark grey, sometimes with pale linear scar. Prominent bulge on forehead with recurved dorsal fin. Moderately long, slender beak with relatively straight mouthline. In transverse section, rostrum ventrally flattened (in Blainville's beaked whale, it is dorsally flattened). Single pair of flattened, triangular teeth (c. 7-8 cm x 3-5 cm), set one-third of gape from tip of lower jaw, set slightly outwards and thus visible outside the mouth, but only in adult males.

Description

Head

The head is proportionately small with a slight bulge in front of a crescent-shaped blowhole on the forehead. It has a pronounced slender beak blending smoothly into the forehead, a relatively straight mouthline and a pair of throat grooves forming a V-shape below. Some adults may exhibit a dark eye patch. There is a single pair of flattened, triangular teeth set one-third of the gape from tip of lower jaw, and exposed above the gum in adult males. In females and immatures, the teeth smaller and concealed.

Body, Fin & Markings

The body is long and spindle-shaped. There is a triangular or slightly recurved small dorsal fin located two-thirds along the back, and relatively narrow, small flippers often tucked into flipper pockets. The tail flukes are un-notched, with a small median projection on the slightly concave trailing edge. The back is uniformly dark grey or indigo, sometimes becoming medium or light grey on the lower flanks and belly. A single pair of scars may occur especially in adult males. A pattern of pale and dark wavy stripes occurs over the back, extending down a short distance from the centre, most noticeable in females and younger animals. Juveniles also have a white belly whilst females often have a patch of white (c. 15 cm in diameter) which extends from the anterior of the genital slit to a point behind the anus.

Distribution

Global Distribution

Gervais' beaked whales are known only from the Atlantic, where they favour warm temperate and subtropical waters. Most records come from the western Atlantic between the Eastern Caribbean and Long Island, New York. It is the most commonly stranded *Mesoplodon* species in the southeastern USA and Gulf of Mexico. In the eastern North Atlantic, the species has been recorded from equatorial West Africa (Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau) north to Ireland but with very few records north of the Iberian Peninsula.

European Waters

Most records (strandings and sightings) in the eastern North Atlantic come from the Canary Islands and Azores; there have also been strandings in Portugal, southern Spain, Italy and Turkey (live stranding).

UK & Ireland

The type specimen was found in the English Channel in 1848 where it was taken to France and described by Gervais (1885). A male stranded in western Ireland at Ballysadare, County Sligo, January 1989.

Abundance

No abundance estimates exist although presumed to be relatively common in waters of the Caribbean and east coast of North America.

Habitat

Not well known, they are presumed to prefer deep ocean basins and trenches, in depths greater than 500 m.

Diet

Very poorly known. They are thought to feed on mesopelagic squid and fish, like other *Mesoplodon* spp. Traces of squid beaks have been found in the stomachs of three stranded animals. Those stranded in the Canary Islands contained squid beaks and mandibles of the deep-sea fish *Chauliodus sloani*.

Behaviour

Not well known. Almost all confirmed records of Gervais' beaked whales have been strandings. Three were observed off Tenerife, Canary Islands; they approached the vessel and swam around it for 10 min. The species is thought to occasionally associate with Cuvier's and Blainville's beaked whales.

Life History

Almost unknown, but it is presumed to be similar to Blainville's beaked whale. One individual was known to be at least 48 years old.

Conservation Threats

The species was hunted off the New Jersey coast in the 19th century, and more recently in Jamaica. It is occasionally taken in small cetacean fisheries, in the eastern Caribbean, and has been recorded entangled in fishing gear. The species is legally protected in European, British and Irish waters.

IUCN status: Data Deficient.

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