



SPECIES FACT SHEET –

True's Beaked Whale **(*Mesoplodon mirus*)**



Photo ©Antonio Portales

Measurements

Length

Newborn: c. 2.33 m
Full grown: 4.5-5.5 m

Weight

Newborn: Unknown
Full grown: 800-1,400 kg

Identification

At Sea

Difficult to distinguish from other *Mesoplodon* spp. (notably Gervais' beaked whale) unless adult male showing teeth, although melon is more pronounced and bulbous than in Gervais' where it slopes gently towards the beak. However, pale blaze on melon may be diagnostic. Grey spindle-shaped body with small head, short beak, and small wide-based recurved dorsal fin two thirds along back (as in other mesoplodont whales). Blow usually bushy or indistinct.

On Land

Slate grey with pale spots and linear scars. Short but clearly defined beak sloping into bulbous forehead with single pair of teeth (exposed above gum only in adult males) at extreme tip of lower jaw. Premaxillae project anteriorly to nasals and vertex of skull when viewed from above.

Description

Head

True's beaked whales have a small head with a bulge in front of crescent-shaped blowhole. There may be a distinct indentation behind blowhole. The beak is short but pronounced (darker towards the tip) and there is a pair of throat grooves forming a V-shape below. There is a single pair of teeth, slightly laterally compressed (25 x 13 mm), oval in cross-section, directed forward and upward at tip of lower jaw, and only visible in adult males; the teeth are smaller and concealed below the gum in young and females. The mouthline is straight or slightly curved. Generally there is a dark ring around the eye, which often connects by a narrow line to a darker colour on top of the head. In some individuals, a clearly delimited diagonal white blaze extends backwards from beak across the blowhole to top of melon reaching ventrally to the eye and the start of the mouthline.

Body, Fin & Markings

The body is long, spindle-shaped, and slightly robust. The triangular or slightly recurved dorsal fin is located two-thirds along the back. The small and narrow flippers are often tucked into flipper pockets. The tail flukes have a trailing edge; usually there is no notch but some show a slight median notch. The bluish-grey on the back becomes lighter on the belly with light spots especially in adult males. Linear scars may be paired, and pale patches may be present in the genital-anal region. Calves usually show little or no scarring and are uniformly grey.

Distribution

Global Distribution

Poorly understood, considered to be widespread in deep waters of temperate North Atlantic (eastern North America to NW Africa and Europe) although also recorded in southern hemisphere off Brazil and southern Africa, extending to southern Australia and New Zealand.

European Waters

11 strandings have been recorded in Europe since 1899. Sightings thought to be of True's beaked whale on the basis of colouration, short, prominent beak with teeth at tip, have been recorded north of Canaries, off the Azores, and in the Bay of Biscay

UK & Ireland

Of the eleven European strandings, nine occurred off west Ireland during February-November, mostly June-July. The one record from Britain is of a stranding in NW Scotland (Kearvaig Bay, Sutherland), Jan 2020 .

Abundance

No estimates of abundance exist. They are assumed to be under-recorded due to their pelagic distribution and difficulty identifying them at sea.

Habitat

Unknown, but it is presumed to be deep ocean basins and trenches. Sightings in the Canaries have all been in waters with depths >2,000 m.

Diet

Few records. It is believed to feed primarily on mesopelagic squid (mostly *Loligo* species) and fish.

Behaviour

Poorly known, due to difficulty identifying at sea. Suspected sightings have been of singles, pairs or groups of up to 3 individuals. Repeated breaching has been observed. Intraspecific competition between adult males has been inferred from protruding teeth and scarring.

Life History

Currently unknown.

Conservation Threats

No information. The species is legally protected in European, Irish and British waters.

IUCN status: Data Deficient.

References

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