

A NOTE ON A STRANDING OF THE HUMPBACK WHALE ON THE SOUTHERN COAST OF BRAZIL

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A humpback whale (*Megaptera novaengliae*) stranded alive on a beach 89 km north of the mouth of Patos Lagoon (31°38'S, 51°21'W), Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Brazil, on August 26, 1980. Fig. 1 shows a map of the position. According to fishermen, a school of approximately ten humpback whales was sighted swimming parallel to the beach on the previous day, and one of them stranded on a sand bank near the beach suddenly. Then, a strong southern wind pushed the whale to the beach. When I arrived there on August 28, the animal was still alive burying its belly into the sand. Although we intended to rescue the animal, it was too large in size to return it to the water.

The animal was male and 11.15 m long. I took some photographs (one of them is shown in Fig. 2), and measured its body proportions based on Leatherwood, Caldwell and Winn (1976), as shown in Table 1. It was estimated from the body length to sexually mature based on Chittleborough (1965). Cirripeds (*Coronula diadema*) infested the animal heavily on tubercles of both jaws and knobs of anterior margins of flippers. Cyamid amphipods which were identified as *Cyamus catodontis* (Arvy, 1977) were also found on the surface of its both jaws.

Fishermen obtained permission from the local fisheries fiscalization agency to kill the animal, and it was slaughtered by about ten fishermen on the beach. The whale oil was sold for leather tanning, and the whale meat was consumed locally. After flensing of the carcass, number of baleen plates of left side were counted by touching the base of each plate, and the length of the longest baleen plate was measured as shown in Table 1. Cervical and caudal vertebrae, some right ribs and right scapula were collected by a team of the Rio Grande Oceanographic Museum, and they were deposited in the museum as the Specimen No. 104.

Fig. 1 summarizes previous records of positions of humpback whales caught or sighted in the waters near Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina in past and suggest that they visited the brazilian coast more frequently in winter. Catch history of humpback whales in the northeastern Brazil indicates that brazilian humpback stock had decreased largely. According to Williamson (1975), the average an annual catch of humpback whales in the whaling

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ground changes from 222.6 whales in the 1910-1914 period to 9.8 in 1960-1963 period, and the last record of catch of humpback whales in Brazilian waters was 1963.

Furthermore, in seven years of monthly observations over 120 km along the coast and three years of on board observations on the R/V "Atlântico Sul" (FURG), this is the first record of a humpback whale in Rio Grande do Sul. This record suggest that the Brazilian stock could be returning to the places they frequented at the beginning of this century, in a similar way as the right whale is doing (Pinedo, 1984).



Fig. 1. Distribution of catch areas and records of *M. novaeangliae* according to Lahille (1903) (○), Townsend (1935) (▲), Hinds (1965) and Paiva & Grangeiro (1965) (▨), Hinds (1965) (□), Vaz-Ferreira (1970) (●), Cummings et al. (1974) (○) and present record (*).

TABLE 1. MEASUREMENTS OF THE STRANDED *M. NOVAEANGLIAE* ON AUGUST 26, 1980 AT RIO GRANDE DO SUL COAST, BRAZIL (AND % OF TOTAL LENGTH)

	cm	n ^o	%
1. Tip of upper jaw to deepest part of fluke notch	1,115.0		100
2. Tip of upper jaw to blowholes	222.0		19.9
3. Tip of upper jaw to angle of gape	320.0		28.7
4. Length of eye (left)	24.0		2.2
5. Rostrum maximum width	91.0		8.2
6. Flipper length-tip to anterior insertion (right)	420.0		37.7
7. Flipper width (right)	110.0		9.9
8. Dorsal fin base	128.0		11.5
9. Dorsal fin height	37.0		3.3
10. Fluke span	432.0		38.7
11. Fluke width	130.0		11.7
12. Blubber thickness (lateral)	19.0		1.7
13. Baleen plates, length longest	45.0		4.0
14. Baleen counts (left upper)		256	
15. Number of maxillar notches (right)		15	
(left)		14	
(middle)		7	
16. Number of vibrissae present in the notches		9	
17. Vibrissae length range	2.3-4.5		

Fig. 2. Male *Megaptera novaeangliae* stranded at Rio Grande do Sul coast (31°38'S, 51°21'W) on August, 1980.

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