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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Title: Whales, dolphins and porpoises stranded on the British coasts

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Source: Sheldrick, M. C. (1977). Whales, dolphins and porpoises stranded on the British coasts. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter, Vol 1 No 6, 32 - 33.*

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1523>

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### Notes and Requests

#### Whales, dolphins and porpoises stranded on the British coasts.

Whales, dolphins and porpoises stranded on the British coastline have been the property of the Crown since a statute was enacted early in the 14th century, as are Cetacea caught in our coastal waters.

There are, however, certain exceptions to this basic statement. For example, in Scotland the pilot whale, the bottle-nosed whale and any other species not exceeding twenty-five feet in length are not 'Fishes Royal', nor are any cetaceans stranded on the coasts in areas where the right of ownership has since passed from the Crown to the Lord of the Manor. It must not be assumed, however, that Cetacea stranded on those parts of the coast that belong to Lords of the Manor can be taken or mutilated in any way without the appropriate permission.

Since 1913 records of cetaceans stranded on the coasts of the British Isles have been kept in the Natural History Museum in London. Since the Museum began its scheme for recording strandings of cetaceans in 1913 over 1900 records have accumulated and twenty two different species are represented.

Through the involvement of their departments, the Receivers of Wreck and Officers of H.M. Coastguard inform the Museum of strandings and send details required on specially prepared forms. In some instances this Museum receives information regarding strandings from members of the general public.

Occasionally members of the Museum staff visit individual strandings to examine the specimens, and in such cases the animal is taken back to the Museum either in entirety or in part. Dissections are often carried out on the beach. The disposal of the remains of all strandings is normally arranged between the Receivers of Wreck or H.M. Coastguard Officers and the local authorities. In this respect there are certain rules that must be followed. Cetaceans stranded must not, for example, be buried below high water mark.

It is necessary to dispose of animals not required by this Museum as soon as practicable as to some extent they are a potential health hazard.

Should any local museum, or any other bona fide institution be interested in obtaining specimens from a stranding, whether in their area or not, they are welcome to contact this Museum for permission to do so. In practice this permission will often be given though under no circumstances should any animal be touched beforehand. When such authority has been granted the institution concerned should liaise with the local Receiver of Wreck or Coastguard Station.

Anyone hearing of a stranding is requested to notify either the Receiver of Wreck, H.M. Coastguard or this Museum.

Frequencies of the Species 1913 - 1976

Species.	Number of records	Order of frequency.
Common porpoise ( <u>Phocoena phocoena</u> )	721	1
Bottle-nosed dolphin ( <u>Tursiops truncatus</u> )	210	2
Common dolphin ( <u>Delphinus delphis</u> )	174	3
Lesser porquál ( <u>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</u> )	128	4
Pilot whale ( <u>Globicephala melaena</u> )	124	5
White-beaked dolphin ( <u>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</u> )	108	6
Bottle-nosed whale ( <u>Hyperoodon ampullatus</u> )	81	7
Risso's dolphin ( <u>Grampus griseus</u> )	74	8
Killer whale ( <u>Orcinus orca</u> )	49	9
White-sided dolphin ( <u>Lagenorhynchus acutus</u> )	40	10
Cuvier's whale ( <u>Ziphius cavirostris</u> )	37	11
Fin whale ( <u>Balaenoptera physalus</u> )	35	12
Sowerby's beaked whale ( <u>Mesoplodon bidens</u> )	28	13
Sperm whale ( <u>Physeter catodon</u> )	23	14
False killer whale ( <u>Pseudorca crassidens</u> )	18	15
Sei whale ( <u>Balaenoptera borealis</u> )	9	16
Euphrosyne dolphin ( <u>Stenella coeruleoalba</u> )	6	17
Blue whale ( <u>Balaenoptera musculus</u> )	4	18
True's beaked whale ( <u>Mesoplodon mirus</u> )	3	19
Harwhal ( <u>Monodon monoceros</u> )	2	20
Pigmy sperm whale ( <u>Kogia breviceps</u> )	1	21 =
White whale ( <u>Delphinapterus leucus</u> )	1	21 =

In addition to those listed above there have been a number of Cetacea stranded which could not be identified from the information given.

The following references may be of interest for further reading and information :-

Fraser, F.C. (1934-74). Reports on Cetacea stranded on the British coasts, nos 11-14. London, British Museum (Natural History).

Harmer, S.F. (1914-27). Reports on Cetacea stranded on the British coasts, nos. 1-10. London, British Museum ( Natural History ).

Sheldrick, M.C. (1976). Trends in the strandings of Cetacea on the British coasts, between 1913-72 Mammal Rev. 6 No. 1. pp. 15-23.