

LIVING WORLD

Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago
Field Naturalists' Club

admin@tffnc.org

ISSN 1029-3299



Temporary Beaching of a Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, at Waterloo, Trinidad and Tobago

G.L. White and R. Gosine

White, G.L., and Gosine, R. 2003. Temporary Beaching of a Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, at Waterloo, Trinidad and Tobago. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2003, 72-72.

NATURE NOTE

Temporary Beaching of a Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, at Waterloo, Trinidad and Tobago.

A pilot whale, *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, was observed at Waterloo on the western coast of Trinidad on 20 January 2003. The shoreline at Waterloo is characterized by shallow water and coastal mudflats. The whale was first sighted at 1330 hours and was watched by several observers. By 1630 the whale was approximately 200 m from shore and four persons waded out to assist it into deeper water. They managed to shift the whale to face out to sea and encouraged it to slowly swim off, however it swam in an arc and headed back to shore, eventually coming within 50 m of the shoreline. Several further attempts were made to encourage the whale to leave but with the same effect. The tide was rising and eventually the whale reached 2 m from the shoreline. Several villagers then walked up to touch and even climb on the whale.

At about 1745 the spout of a second whale was observed about 200 m out to sea. Very shortly afterwards the beached whale became animated and launched out to sea, splattering mud several meters into the air, as it swam in the shallow, muddy water. The shoreline at Waterloo has extensive mudflats.

The following morning, GW scanned the coastline from Barracones Bay to Orange Valley, but there was no sign of the whale. In addition, there was no indication in the media of any whales stranded on subsequent days and we assumed that the whale survived.

The whale was about 7 m (tip to tail), and the dorsal fin was comparatively short (about 30 cm). The tail flukes were estimated

to be six times the height of the dorsal fin. The head was blunt, and square with the mouth ventral in position. These observations fit the description of a short-finned pilot whale, albeit a large one (Eisenberg 1989). The dorsal fin was too short and the wrong shape for a pygmy sperm whale and the body was too large for a Risso's dolphin.

Whale sightings are rare around Trinidad and beachings should be recorded. What makes this observation different is the sudden change in the disposition of the whale and the ease with which it returned of its own volition to the sea.

Previously on 14-15 April, 1999 two whales were sighted close to the shore, one at Orange Valley and the other at Brickfield. The one at Orange Valley was slaughtered but efforts were made to save the one at Brickfield (Trinidad Express Newspaper April 28, 1999).

Other recent whale beachings in Trinidad include three separate incidents in the Galeota area, during the second half of April 1999 (Trinidad Express Newspaper April 28, 1999), and one incident on Manzanilla beach on 13 October, 1999 when 25 pilot whales were stranded. Of these 14 were saved (Trinidad Express Newspaper 15 October, 1999).

REFERENCE

Eisenberg, J. F. 1989. Mammals of the Neotropics. Volume 1. The Northern Neotropics. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 449 p.

G.L. White and R. Gosine
16 Waterloo Estate, Carapichaima.
E-mail: g-white@tstt.net.tt