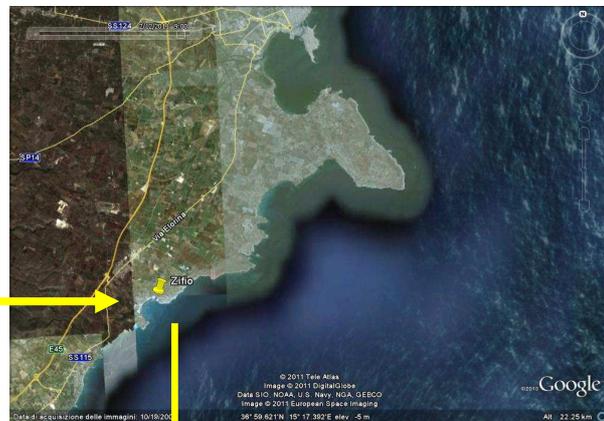


# Stranding of two live *Ziphius cavirostris* in Sicily

Report by A. Barlotta

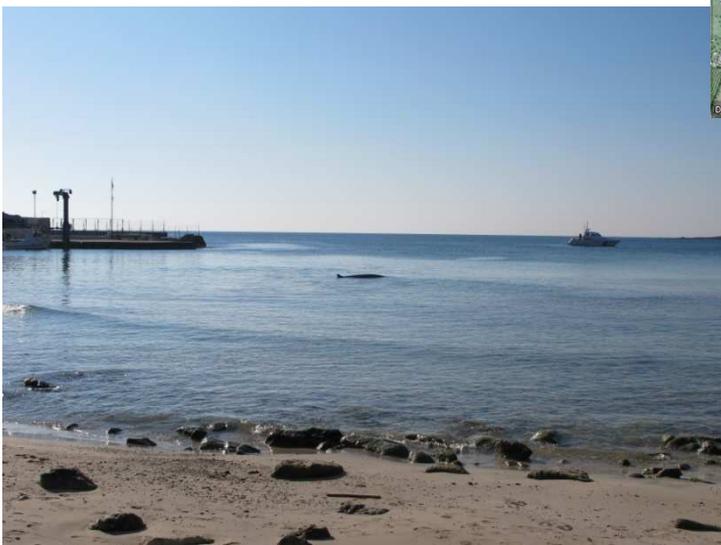
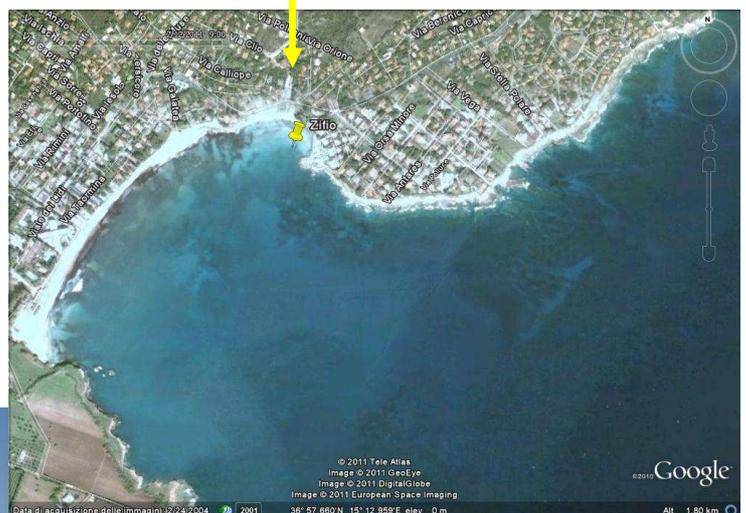
On February 8 2011, two Cuvier's beaked whales stranded alive on the Sicilian coastline close to Fontane Bianche (Syracuse). The two whales were later on the same day towed to open waters by the Coast Guard. On the following day (February 9) we were called by the Port Authority of Syracuse and alerted of the stranding of one large cetacean in the same area.



Local coordinates were:

**Lat. 36° 57.848'N**

**Long. 15° 12.813'E**



I immediately confirmed that the beaked whale was an adult *Ziphius cavirostris* (G. Cuvier, 1823). The

specimen was 5.05 m long. The dorsal fin had an height of 29 cm and the fluke had a width of 1.22 m. Considering body size, scars and other distinguishing marks, I realized it was one of the two whales stranded and released the day before.

The specimen was stranded along a sandy slightly sloped shore with a depth of approx 1.30 m.

The depth allowed the animal to float. I was also able to easily inspect the whale closely directly in the water.

The whale was constantly trying to head toward the shore front, a tendency that we opposed to maintain better floating condition



The whale lying momentarily on the side

and avoid drying of the skin.

By my own judgement the animal kept moving regularly and with what appeared to be sufficient coordination, even if sometimes the specimen showed jerking movement perhaps due to pain or

spasms. In these occasions, the whale appeared to rotate along the longitudinal axis. Together with the rescue team of the Fondo Siciliano per la Natura (Sicily Wildlife Found, *Luigi Lino, Vincenzo Figura, Daniela Romeo, Sonia Terranova, Simona Cappello, Denise Grassi e Maria Grazia*

*Muscianisi*), I repositioned the whale on normal floating position and re-established the physiological position.

On the whole, our actions were aimed at:

- Maintain the humidity of the exposed skin by continuously wetting the back of the animal
- Maintain the physiological position of the pectoral fins, to avoid compression and friction on the sea bottom
- Check the functionality of the blowhole and the respiratory movement to avoid drowning

Here follows a list of personal observation I made directly on the specimen:

- the animal showed no signs of skin lesions possibly related to fishing gears, no sign of ship collisions or cuts due to a propeller. On the



other hand, there were several signs of repeated frictions on the rocks of the shore, with loss of the superficial layers of the skin. A witness reported to the local Port Authority that early on the

same morning (07:00 a.m.) the whale appeared more reactive and repeatedly smashed its head against the nearby docks.

Consequently most of the skin lesions I was able to observe were located on the lower and lateral surfaces of the mandible and along the



ventral side of the thorax. The fluke showed only circular abrasions. These latter were in my opinion due to the actions of the personnel of the **Area Marina Protetta del Plemmirio** (the local Marine Protected Area) and of the local Port Authority who towed the two beaked whales to open waters the day before. However the abrasions were quite superficial and showed no hoedema. The fluke was in axis and its movements were regular and quite natural.



I observed several specimens of *Pennella crassicornis* all over the body.

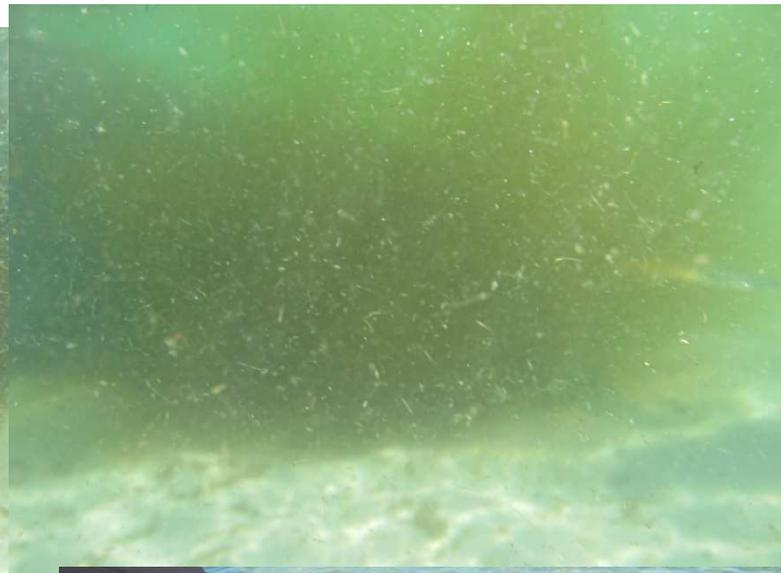
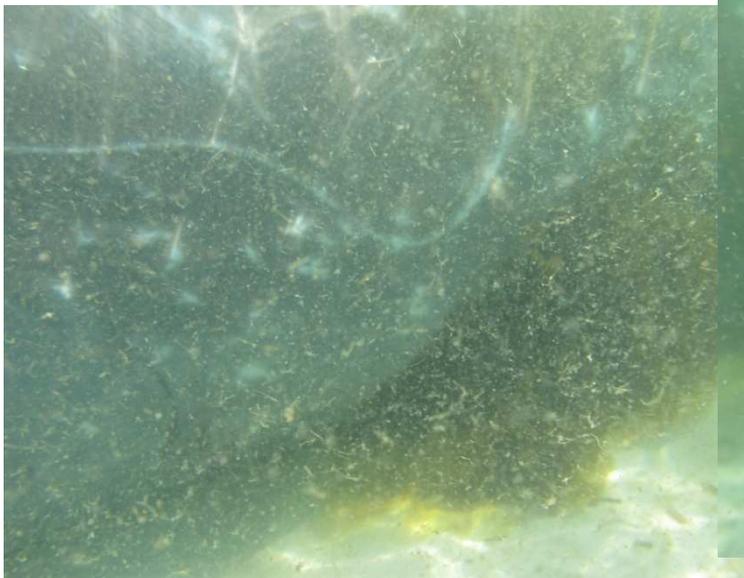


There were no signs of damages to the respiratory apparatus: there was no foam or mucus within and around the blowhole. There was no tell-tale smell indicative of the presence of bacteria in the airways. There were no anomalous noises linked to breathing (coughing, rasps). Breathing was every 15 to 20”.



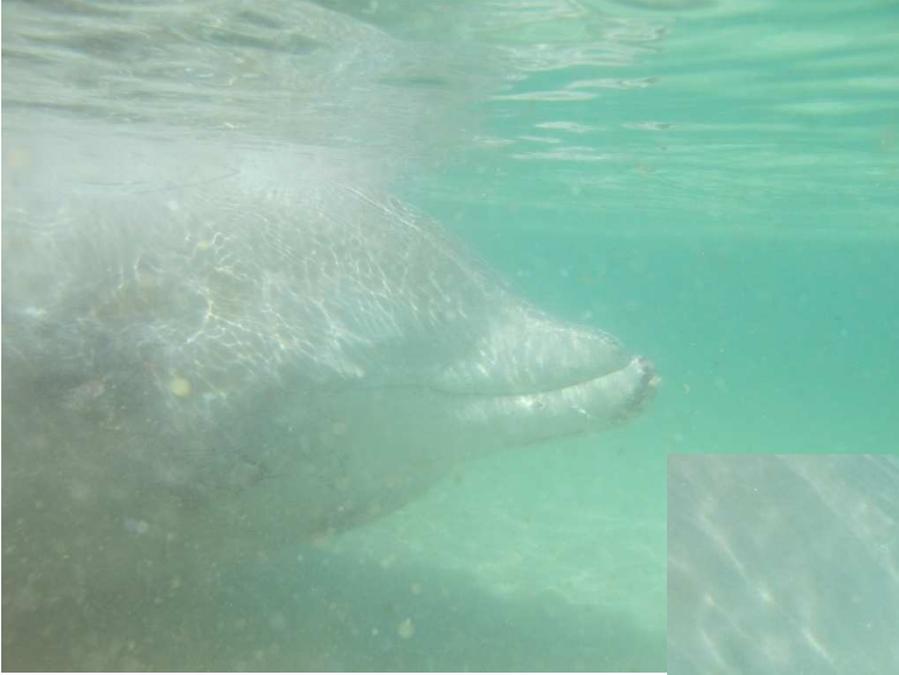
The mouth appeared normal. I saw no hooks or residues of fishing gears or other foreign bodies that could impair feeding.

The animal evacuated often. The feces were brown and liquid and immediately dispersed in the water. There was no mucus or gas.



We had no ways to check the genital opening, because of the position of the animal. However we noted no teeth in the lower jaw and we considered the animal likely to be a female.





The animal was finally towed (once more) to open waters based on specific instructions of local animal health Authorities after i.m. administration of a vitamin complex.

The whale was released at 01:00 p.m. approx 3 miles out of CAPO MURRO DI PORCO. Once set free of the towing gears, the animal spontaneously swam away and was no longer sighted.

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