

A Note on the Cetacea stranded on the Cocos-Keeling Islands

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It would seem that the only terrestrial mammals occurring on the Cocos-Keeling Islands are the Rodents reported on above by Dr. G. H. H. Tate. For a time in the eighteen-eighties George Clunes-Ross kept a mixed herd of feral deer, *Cervus unicolor russa* Müll. and Schleg. and *Muntiacus m. muntjak* (Zimm.), imported from Java, on Pulo Luar (Horsburgh Island), but they did not last long. According to H. N. Ridley (*in litt.*) they became panic-stricken and plunged into the sea when E. W. Birch tried to hunt them with dogs in the course of his official inspection of 1885. More probably, like the domestic goats which were later placed on Pulo Tikus, they found the local vegetation too tough and salt for their stomachs.

No whales have previously been reported from the Cocos-Keeling Islands, but I found evidence of two strandings prior to my stay there. In addition I was told that a toothed whale, between 12 and 18 feet long and grey in colour, swam into the lagoon about 1930, and was stranded on the coral towards the south end. It was killed and the flesh eaten. Unfortunately no fragments of the bony skeleton could be found for me in the village on Pulo Selma.

Physeter catodon Linn.

Sperm Whale or Cachalot.

A dead Sperm Whale, about 56 feet in length, is recorded as having floated into the lagoon in August 1937, and come to rest on the inner beach of Pulo Pasir. It is said to have been black above, and whitish below. The flesh was not considered edible, but some 1,230 gallons of oil were extracted from the carcase, some of which was still being used in 1941 to lubricate the two motor launches. Fragments of the skull, several ribs and a number of vertebrae, the latter measuring $12\frac{1}{2}$ –13" across the disc, were then lying on waste ground towards the north end of Pulo Selma. One vertebra has been deposited in the Raffles Museum collection.

Globiocephala ? macrorhyncha Gray. (Indian) Pilot Whale.

A small school of about 20 Pilot Whales had apparently stranded on the sea beach of Pulo Panjang, at the south-west corner of the atoll, about 1925. The bones were much worn, and the broken skull brought back cannot be assigned with

certainty to *macrorhyncha*, though this would seem to be the only species likely to occur in this area. The small whale which entered the lagoon a few years later may also have belonged to it, except that *G. macrorhyncha* is usually described as black in colour, and my informant was most certain that the whale that he had helped to eat was grey, not black. Grey (*kêlabu*) on the Cocos-Keeling Islands is normally an ash or mid grey, and not a dark grey which is called black (*hitam*).

There are relatively few recorded strandings of the Indian Pilot Whale, though small schools must have come ashore on a number of beaches round the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas without any note being kept of the event. The type specimen lacks precise data. The earliest recorded stranding occurred in July 1852, when several dozen individuals were marooned in shallow water in the Ganges delta (Blanford, 1891: 577). The next was on 29 March, 1912, when eight whales came ashore at Jeram, on the coast of Selangor in the Straits of Malacca: the skeleton of one, measuring 11 feet 9" in the flesh, and the skull of a second, are now in the Raffles Museum collection. Then in 1914, 27 individuals were stranded at Kampong Nias, near Sabang on Pulau Weh, off the northern end of Sumatra (Weber, 1923: 18). Finally 55 are reported as having come ashore at Besuki, on the Javanese side of the Madura Strait, on 2nd January, 1923, (Delsman, 1923: 33; and Dammermann, 1924: 340 *et seq.*). The Buitenzorg Museum also contains four skulls which probably came from Lombok or Solor, in the Lesser Sunda Islands (Dammermann, *loc. cit.*). This species, or certainly one Pilot Whale, would seem to be better known in the Flores-Timor Sea region, and it is said that the flesh is eaten in this area, as, of course, is that of the North Atlantic *G. melaena* in the Shetlands and Faroes.

References

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- DELSMAN, H. C. 1923. "Eene stranding in straat Madoera", *De Tropische Natuur*, 3: 33.
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New Forms described in this number of the Bulletin of the
Raffles Museum (No. 22)

Reef Corals, by John W. Wells.

Acropora pinguis, p. 37.

Acropora schmitti, p. 39.

Porites cocosensis, p. 47.

Porites gibsonhilli, p. 45.

Mollusca, by R. Tucker Abbott.

Succinea keelingensis, p. 87.

Crustacea (Brachyura), by M. W. F. Tweedie.

Platypodia keelingi, p. 114.

Paraxanthias gibsonhilli, p. 118.

Sesarma sigillata, p. 131.

Brachynotus harpax is made the type of a new genus,
Thalassograpsus.

Pisces, by N. B. Marshall.

Scorpaenodes keelingensis, p. 199.

Mammalia (Muridae), by G. H. H. Tate.

Rattus rattus keelingensis, p. 276.