



Special points of interest:

- Meet the Eastern Caribbean Island Coordinators
- Strandings in the EC region
- WHAT IS THIS?



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# Eastern Caribbean Cetacean Network

## Marine Mammal Stranding Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 1

March 15, 2008

### Welcome to the ECCN

#### Protect. Preserve. Promote.

This is the heart of our mission at the Eastern Caribbean Cetacean Network (ECCN), a non-profit organization established in 1990, dedicated solely to scientific research and educational outreach on marine mammals and their habitats in the *Eastern Caribbean* region.

Through partnerships with regional NGO's, governmental organizations and UNEP's Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Programme, ECCN creates conservation-based research, education, and outreach programmes designed to connect the public with policy-makers on how their actions and decisions will affect marine mammals.

Many of the ways humans challenge the environment—new and increasing levels of pollution, debris, and noise from industrial construction—affect marine mammals. Although, the human activities that affect these animals are unlikely to stop, we can think about what we do, and make choices about an integrated regional-scale approach to research, outreach and policy strategy within an environmentally relevant and socially responsible framework. In sum, our ability to learn about and protect marine mammals will be determined by understanding the mosaic of interactions, including the pervasive historical, geographic, biological, chemical, and human factors, which influence their abundance and distribution.

With warm regards,  
*Nathalie Ward*  
Executive Director, ECCN



### “News You Can Use About Marine Mammal Strandings”

ECCN's biannual newsletter aims to provide information about marine mammal strandings and relevant issues that will contribute to our understanding of scientific phenomena, help to inspire our stewardship efforts and guide our education and outreach programs. In the forthcoming issues, you will be introduced to ECCN island coordinators, stranding events in the region, and stories of interest in marine mammal science. If we are to continue exploring domains unknown and protect those already known to us, we must first inspire and educate our youth and the public at large. This is our greatest challenge.

Our first issue highlights recent strandings, the EC Island Coordinators and some of the issues regarding stranding events. You will also read in this issue about how ECCN and our partners are combining efforts. We thank our current contributors and welcome your contributions and suggestions for the next issue.



Photo courtesy of W. Rossite

*"Learning why these animals strand may help uncover risks and threats to ocean and human health"*

## Marine Mammals and Ocean Health

Looking at satellite images of earth from space, one's eyes may be drawn to the ice covered peaks and valleys of the Andes, the drifting sands of the Sahara desert, or the winding blue veins of multitudes of rivers and streams etching their way outward— out to the vast expanse of deep blue ocean surrounding these magnificent contours of land. While there is no question that while the view of Earth's landscapes from space are awe inspiring, the view of earth from under the ocean, of undersea mountains, the ocean floor, of streams, currents and fronts, is as inspiring and almost extraterrestrial, compared to the familiar view of our same planet from space. The ocean is vast, undiscovered and alive.

Over 70% of our planet is ocean supporting the argument to examine the health of our planet as a marine system, one where the direct and indirect effects of human activity most often find their way to the ocean including waste from industrial, medical and agricultural activities, overfishing, global warming, and noise pollution.

The notion that marine mammals act as environmental sentinels to these threats is one that has been held for over 30 years. They are mammals like us: long lived, trophically similar, and able to garner public attention world wide. Research on marine mammals has enabled a better understanding of long term changes in population level effects in humans and wildlife to chemical, noise and pathogen pollution. This has been done through behavioral observations and collection of tissue samples including marine mammals sampled with great care during stranding events.

Stranded marine mammals provide a very important and unique role as sentinels. A stranded marine mammal is one that it is out of its element, unable to return to its ocean environment. They are the first line of defense to understanding ocean and human health if we choose to listen and pay close attention. Learning why these animals strand may help uncover risks and threats to ocean and human health. With the dedication of the volunteers and coordinators of the ECCN, we are taking on this challenge. Through education and outreach we are listening, communicating, promoting healthy oceans and aiding in conservation of marine mammals and marine resources.

## Stranding Event Updates in the EC Region: 2007-2008



Photos: James Peirce

### Mass Stranding and Release of Spinner Dolphins, July 28th 2007 in Barbados

On July 28th, 2007 at Burke's Beach, Carlisle Bay St. Michael, 7 adult spinner dolphins entered shallow water and eventually stranded. The animals prior to stranding split into 2 groups of 4 and of 3. The group of two attempted to strand multiple times, while the 3 remained offshore.

Attempts to prevent stranding by splashing water and deterring animals from beaching appeared to increase the stress of the animals. To best assess the condition of the animals and coordinate the stranding event, people were ordered out of the water and the dolphins were allowed to strand. The two stranded dolphins were assessed by Dr. Gus Reader, Chief Veterinary Officer and EC Island Coordinator for Barbados. All animals appeared healthy and a release of the animals was coordinated. Using swimmers and a dinghy, the dolphins were guided out of the harbor through a gap in the line of anchored yachts.

The group of animals appeared unwilling to approach the yachts but once through the gap of boats, headed offshore, and were not seen again.

## Beaked Whale Stranding July 18th 2007 Turtle Beach, Tobago



Photos courtesy of  
G. Lalsingh

While monitoring leather back sea turtle nesting grounds, Giancarlo Lalsingh, Environment Tobago Education Officer and Tobago EC Island Coordinator, came across a dead beaked whale on the Caribbean side of the island at Great Courland Bay.

It appears to be a Gervais' beaked whale, *Mesoplodon europaeus*, or a Cuvier's beaked whale, *Ziphius cavirostris*.

Beaked whales are hard to distinguish. Good photo documentation of teeth present (or absent) within the mouth can help to confirm identification. With young animals the few teeth that may be present, may not be erupted. Skulls can be used for species confirmation, though a small skin samples can be frozen and help aid in species determination by genetic evaluation. For more information on beaked whale identification go to:

[http://vertebrates.si.edu/mammals/beaked\\_whales/pages/main\\_menu.htm](http://vertebrates.si.edu/mammals/beaked_whales/pages/main_menu.htm)



## The Barbados 'Blob'



Photo G. Franklyn and C. Taylor

On March 6, 2008 Dr. Julia Horrocks reported to the ECCN a stranding consisting of "two large pieces of blubber and a few bones." While most may consider this type of stranding to hold a dearth of information, it is not without value. A vertebrae and both shoulder joints were still attached, and a wealth of goo remains. From these remaining clues, it may be possible to determine what species of whale the Barbados Blob actually is. The bones that remain can be compared to other whale species and viable DNA may still be isolated from the remaining samples for genetic determination of the species. We will keep you posted!

## Report a Stranding

Over the last few years, ECCN has recorded numerous reports of strandings and sightings of marine mammals. Here are just a few examples:

**2000**– Bryde's Whale - Barroullie



40 short finned pilot whales stranded in Petite Martinique

**2001**– June 5, Pilot Whales - Petite Martinique

**2005**-

April 4, melon headed whale- Caricou

October, Kogia spp. Barbados

**2006**-

March 27, Guadeloupe rough toothed-dolphins - Tobago



Short finned pilot whales stranded July 16, 2006 in

May 8, Short finned pilot whale - Trinidad

July 16, Short-finned pilot whales - Guadeloupe

August 16, Atlantic spotted dolphin - Trinidad

September 24, 3 Hooded seals - Guadeloupe

**2007**-

March 25, Sperm whale- Barbados

**2008**-

March 2, Unidentified whale, Barbados

To report a stranding of a dead or live marine mammal contact your EC Island Coordinator, (see page 6) or

Dr. Nathalie Ward at:  
Nathalie@eccnwhale.org

or  
andrea@eccnwhale.org

If you are outside the Eastern Caribbean area, we will do our best to put you in contact with the appropriate person in your region.

## Rare Predatory Observation at Sea: Attack of a Pygmy Sperm Whale by an Orca in Barbados– 2007



J. Peirce

Photos above and right © James Peirce

While heading out on a fishing expedition in January 2007, a few miles southeast of Barbados, James Peirce and crew spotted something other than the usual humpback or sperm whale. As they approached the blow of what seemed to be one whale, two dorsal fins both 4-5 feet tall came into focus. Between the two dorsal fins, a smaller grey colored whale was visible, still alive in the grasps of the two larger whales' powerful jaws. The two larger whales were killer whales. The smaller whale, a pygmy sperm whale was pulled underwater and quickly consumed. Through careful documentation of tooth counts (27 in the lower jaw) and photographs of the remaining head, Peirce and his crew documented a rarely observed feeding event between two extraordinary marine mammal species in the region.



J. Peirce

## Featured Creature -The Pygmy and the Dwarf Sperm Whale

The pygmy sperm whale and the dwarf sperm whale—the smallest species to be called whales—are rarely seen at sea and are known mainly from infrequent strandings. Superficially, these species are almost identical to each other, although the pygmy is larger than the dwarf sperm whale. Unlike the great sperm whale that has a dorsal ridge or hump, the two smaller species have a small dorsal fin, and there is no size difference between the genders.

Sightings of these cryptic animals occur primarily in deeper waters in the Caribbean; they do not form large groups or draw attention to themselves with aerial acrobatics. The dwarf sperm whale is reported occasionally near the leeward coasts of Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent. In parts of the Windward Islands, pygmy and dwarf sperm whales are known as “rat porpoises,” possibly because of their underslung lower jaw and sharp teeth or their furtive behaviour. In ancient Japan, these whales were called uki-kujira, or “floating whales,” because of their tendency to lie motionless at the ocean surface. At sea, they are often seen basking at the surface. Unlike the sperm whale, they have a sac in the lower intestine filled with about 12 litres (3 gallons) of a syrupy, reddish-brown fluid, which they expel into the water when startled. Like the ink of the squid, the liquid creates a dense cloud that may deter a predator or conceal the whale's escape.

The pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*), is rarely seen, but may be distinguished by its dark, steel-grey to blue-grey back; a small, slightly hooked, falcate dorsal fin (set well back behind the midpoint); a tiny, underslung, light-coloured jaw; a blunt head, and “false gill.” May be confused with the dwarf sperm whale. Adults reach 3 to 3.4 metres (10-11 ft), 400 kilograms (900 lbs). At birth, approximately 1.2 metres (4 ft), 55 kilograms (120 lbs). Pygmy sperm whales typically travel in groups of 3 to 10 animals. Animals often appear slow and sluggish at sea, with no visible blow.

The Dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia simus*), is a small toothed whale, reaching only 2.1 to 2.7 metres (7-9 ft) and 280 kilograms (600 lbs) as an adult. At birth, approximately 1 metre (3 ft), 45 kilograms (100 lbs). Shark like profile, with a more pointed snout than the pygmy sperm whale. Large dorsal fin set near middle of back. Bluish-grey or dark grey in colour, with a white arc (“false gill”) behind the eye. Typically found alone or with one other individual (up to groups of 10).



Drawing of *K. breviceps*, Pygmy sperm whale. © Wurtz-Artescienza



Drawing of *K. Simus*, Dwarf sperm whale. [seamap.env.duke.edu/seamap/species/images/dwarf-sperm-whale-66.jpg](http://seamap.env.duke.edu/seamap/species/images/dwarf-sperm-whale-66.jpg)

## Recent Stranding Publications and Resources

Marine Mammal Science is a field that is anything but just about Marine Mammals.

Policy, social sciences, technology, ecology, as well as animal and human health sciences are just a few of the topics related to marine mammal strandings. There are many great resources for current publications in marine mammal science— The very short list below provides a look at some of the resources available. In upcoming issues, we will provide links to recent publications and reports of interest. If you have a publication to present, let us know.

<http://www.wdcs.org/>

<http://www.seaweb.org/resources/publicationsreports.php> ( subscribe to marine science review: marine mammals)

<http://whale.wheelock.edu/whalenet-stuff/interwhale.html>

## What is this? (From the front page)



Doesn't look familiar?

The image on the front page was taken from a stranded Cuvier's Beaked whale, *Ziphius Cavirostris*, in the Northeast U.S. The odd pin point oval shaped marks are from the mouth of a sea lamprey feeding on the whale (see photo at left). Taking note of even the smallest details of a stranded marine mammal can lead to some interesting findings!!!

Source: US EPA Great Lakes National Program

## In the Field: Identifying Cause of Stranding– Bycatch, Vessel Collision and Entanglement

Though most stranded marine mammals come ashore debilitated by illness, there are also cases of strandings which are the direct result of human induced causes. This includes: bycatch, animals caught unintentionally in fishing gear, vessel collision and/or propeller strike, and entanglement. Excess stress due to various types of harassment can also cause marine mammals to strand.

Evaluating all stranding cases consistently for signs of human interaction, as well as all basic measurements, allows for scientifically accurate, dependable and unbiased data set that can be used for conservation, management and education.

While looking at cases of stranded marine mammals, live or dead, it is possible to rule in or out certain types of human interaction. Though a thorough necropsy (an animal autopsy) is the best way to determine cause of mortality, it is not always possible and even so, many clues to determine cause of stranding are often overlooked. Whether live or dead, one can take the time to make careful observations and systematically note the presence or absence of external signs of human interaction. Line marks can be left behind on the external surface of the skin of many cetaceans caught in nets (see photo above). Entanglement often occurs on the leading edges of fins and flukes. Bruising and broken bones can signify trauma. Propellers are often the cause of deep parallel cuts. If you would like to learn more about determining human interactions in stranded marine mammals or what a marine mammal necropsy entails, contact ECCN and check out this marine mammal necropsy manual at:



Dolphin bycaught in gillnet. Note the 2 line impressions on this animal.  
Photo: A. Bogomolni

<https://darchive.mblwhoilibrary.org/bitstream/1912/1823/3/WHOI-2007-06.pdf>

## Eastern Caribbean Island Coordinators

Throughout the Eastern Caribbean region are designated Island Coordinators who have graciously volunteered their expertise to assist in marine mammal strandings, act as a data collection center for stranding events, and serve as the contact and liaison for stranding reports. To the right is a list of current Island Coordinators. If you have questions about a stranding in your area and need guidance for live and dead strandings of marine mammals, contact your local island coordinator. Their contact information can also be found on the ECCN website at:

[www.eccnwhale.org/coordinators.html](http://www.eccnwhale.org/coordinators.html)

### **Barbados– Dr. Gus Reader**

reader@sunbeach.net

### **Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines– Alexandra Paolino**

alexandra.paolino@gmail.com

### **Dominica– Arienne Perryman**

aperrys@hotmail.com

Tel: 767.448.2188

### **Grenada– Christine Curry**

Christine@marvet.org

### **Guadeloupe–Caroline Rinaldi**

Courbaril  
97125 Bouillante Guadeloupe FWI  
Tel: 0690.33.81.24  
evastropic@wanadoo.fr

### **St. Lucia– Caroline Aimable**

aimablec@candw.lc

Tel: 758.459.7783

Tel: 758.457.1360

### **Tobago- Giancarlo Lalsingh**

C/O Save Our Sea Turtles

P.O. Box 27

Scarborough,

Tobago, West Indies

Tel: 868.736.4274

corner\_house@hotmail.com

info@sos-tobago.org (attn: G. Lalsingh)

### **Trinidad– Dr. Wade Seukeran**

tenderheartvet@yahoo.com  
Environmental Logistics TT/ c/o  
Tenderheart Veterinary Service  
36 Eastern Main Road  
St. Augustine, Trinidad  
Tel: 868.645.3883 (work)

## Meet An Island Coordinator: Giancarlo Lalsingh

Giancarlo Lalsingh is Tobago's Island Coordinator. Over the last few years, he has reported several stranding events on the Island, but his passion for marine life, extends much farther than just marine mammals!

Mr. Lalsingh works with Environment TOBAGO as their Project and Education Coordinator focusing on environmental education and awareness in schools and communities. He also works with Save Our Sea Turtles, which is a Tobago based sea turtle conservation group where he helps to coordinate beach patrols, tagging and data collection on nesting beaches of endangered sea turtles, as well as conducting education and awareness programmes for communities, schools and visitors to Tobago. He has been involved in sea turtle research for the last 14 years.

Like many of the most dedicated conservationists, Mr. Lalsingh has always had a love for all things in nature since he was young. It is only fitting he ended up in a profession where he is able to help to conserve the environment in such a direct way. Especially one that enables him to influence the decisions of young people by providing them with a balanced view of human interactions with the environment, showing which actions are positive and negative and how they can help make the right decisions for not only themselves but for future generations.

When asked what he hopes to accomplish as the Tobago island coordinator, the response was one of hope, encouragement and intent. "Not many people are aware of whales or dolphins here in Tobago (and Trinidad). They only becoming aware of these animals when a stranding occurs. Trinidad and Tobago were once a mecca for whales and dolphins until whaling in the early 1500s wiped most of them out. I hope to increase awareness about whales and dolphins in general through school and public education programmes; help train people on what they can do when a stranding occurs in order to give better support and care to stranded animals if and when they occur." (*con't on page 7*)



Giancarlo Lalsingh working late into the night to protect nesting sea turtles on Tobago

### Meet an EC Island Coordinator– (Lalsingh- con't from page 6)

In order to better respond to strandings on Tobago, Mr. Lalsingh stressed the importance of more training in order to boost the local capacity to deal with a stranding events and analysis of samples collected and research. In addition, he notes more legislation is needed that deals specifically with marine mammals and stranding events. Currently there are no laws in Trinidad & Tobago which deal specifically with either issue and this leads to conflicts with regard to "who is responsible" when a stranding event occurs. Although local efforts have been set up, these are only advisory at best and have no legal standing. His third request is greater local and regional links throughout the Caribbean that support cooperation between groups.

"Obviously we have a long way to go, so while we continue to build our capacity with regard stranding events, we need to recognize that we do not have to "re-invent the wheel" and can learn from the past mistakes and benefit from existing expertise, even if these exist outside of the Caribbean. This is shown in the fact that even though (human) groups may be isolated to particular islands, whales and dolphins are not and move many thousands of miles throughout the territorial water of the wider Caribbean and beyond."

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### Seeking Solutions– Current News in the EC Region

#### Dolphin Meat– Big seller in Trinidad and Tobago by Karissa Ali (TT MMSN)

The dolphin is increasingly being captured and sold Trinidad and Tobago for food. Reports by the Trinidad & Tobago Express Newspaper show that sales of the meat by fishermen in markets across the country has spiked within recent months.

What has caused this sudden upsurge in the killing and selling of this beloved animal? During Lent, many Trinbagonians fast from fowl in favour of fish, increasing the demand for seafood. The fishermen's latest gripe is that they have to travel further out to sea, as polluted waters have resulted in a decline in popular and common types of fish. They have resorted to selling dolphins - possibly as a by-catch or opportunistically. However, dolphins are MAMMALS, NOT FISH, which means that they are red meat, and wholly inappropriate for Lent! Sadly the government allows this to continue; under the Fisheries Act of Trinidad and Tobago, dolphins are not a protected species.

Another cause for concern is the potential for disease or toxicity caused by consumption of the meat. According to Veterinarian and coordinator of the Trinidad and Tobago Marine Mammal Stranding Network (TTMMSN), Dr. Wade Seukeran, not only are dolphins exposed to high levels of contaminants and pollutants such as mercury and lead, they may also have diseases which can be easily transferred to human beings upon consumption. Mammals such as dolphins and whales are near the top of the food chain and concentrate in their flesh, the chemicals found in regular fish. It is also important to note that dolphins have just one baby every few years and they spend a lot of time and energy in bringing up their babies. Depending on the species, they nurse their young for two years. An adult female does not reproduce until 10-13 years old. The male does not start reproducing until 12-14 years. This means that catching and killing these animals will cause greater and faster damage to dolphin populations than catching fish will to the fish population.

One of the roles of the Trinidad and Tobago Marine Mammal Stranding Network is to contribute to the database of information regarding the species of marine mammals found in our waters. The TTMMSN is widely advertised in fishing depots and police posts along Trinidad and Tobago's coastlines as the first point of contact for any event related to a marine mammal, be it a stranding, a sighting or an accidental capture. Scientific data is collected upon response, which help us identify the species and investigate the health of the individual. Toxicity levels in tissues and organs give an indication of pollution levels in our waters and marine mammals can be used as bio-indicators to monitor the health of our marine ecosystem. If you wish to contact us or share your concerns, please send us an email at:

[marinemammalstranding@yahoo.com](mailto:marinemammalstranding@yahoo.com)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marinemammalstranding>



Eastern Caribbean Cetacean Network

ECCN  
P.O. Box 130 BQ  
Bequia, Saint Vincent and  
the Grenadines

For More Information  
contact:

Dr. Nathalie Ward,  
Director  
Nathalie@eccnwhale.org

To report a stranding  
event, for article  
submission or to receive  
future newsletters,  
contact:

Andrea Bogomolni,



Photo: S. Landry

Assistant Director,  
Editor  
andrea@eccnwhale.org

ECCN

## OUR MISSION:

*Through research and education, ECCN's objective is to gain community support for the protection of resident and migratory whales and dolphins AND their marine habitat. The network is a regional, volunteer network that records sightings and strandings of marine mammals in the Eastern Caribbean.*

Gratitude to the following organizations and individuals who have supported workshops, attendance to conferences and the ECCN Newsletter and Database Coordination:

Office of International Affairs, U.S. NOAA Fisheries

U.S. NOAA Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

Cetacean Society International

International Fund for Animal Welfare

## Name the Newsletter

Do you have a better name for the newsletter? Send an email or fax and let us know!

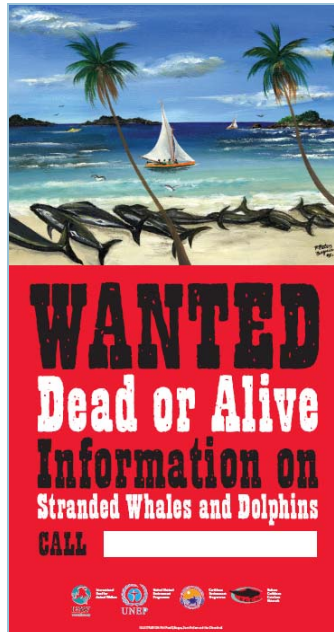
## Upcoming Events

If you would like to announce upcoming meetings or events related to marine mammals, let us know. Up and coming ECCN events:

ECCN Presentation at  
Bahamas Marine Mammal  
Stranding Workshop (3 & 4  
May 2008)

UNEP/SPAW's Meeting in  
Martinique, (1-5 July 2008)

ECCN Stranding Training  
Workshop in Guadeloupe  
(November 2008)



Some resources are available, such as the poster above, for educational and outreach distribution on marine mammal strandings through ECCN.

## FUN FAQs!

Did you know?

That sperm whales were once not only hunted for their oil (spermaceti oil) but that their gastrointestinal tract contains an oily substance called *ambergris*, once valued for its use in manufacturing perfume!

The Cuvier's beaked whale holds the record for deepest and longest dives ever recorded amongst air breathing animals, with a maximum depths of nearly 1,900 meters (about 6,230 feet) and maximum duration of 85 minutes,