

Short note | Nota breve

A stranding of pygmy killer whale *Feresa attenuata* Gray, 1874 on Boavista during February 2012: first record for the Cape Verde Islands

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On 10 February 2012, at 0845 UTC, a mass stranding involving seven (six adults and a juvenile) pygmy killer whales *Feresa attenuata* Gray, 1874 occurred at Praia de Boa Esperança (16°12'26"N, 22°52'00"W), along the northern coast of Boavista island, Cape Verde Islands. The event was witnessed by a group of kite-surfers, who managed to move three animals (two adults and a juvenile) back to the sea. No re-strandings were noted. At 1330 UTC, staff of the Protected Areas Department visited the site and recorded four specimens (two alive and two dead). At 1700 UTC, only two carcasses were found on the beach, the others apparently having been washed out to sea. During the morning of 11 February 2012, necropsies of both specimens (registered as BV01/2012 and BV02/2012) were performed. Both individuals were identified as adult lactating females (milk exuded from the nipples and came out profusely when the mammary gland was severed during necropsy procedures). External examination revealed good body condition and no evidence of human or fishery interactions. Both carcasses showed bite scars of cookiecutter sharks *Isistius* sp. on the ventral areas. Specimen BV01/2012 had several slightly bleeding scratches on the head and sides, likely caused by collision with nearby rocks. No macroscopic lesions were found in the internal organs. Specimen BV01/2012 showed a heavy nematode

infestation in the fore-stomach. A few nematodes were also present in the main stomach of specimen BV02/2012. *Phyllobothrium* occurred in the genital area of both whales. Stomach contents were abundant in both specimens (heads, jaws, otoliths and other bones of a small schooling fish species), while one whale's stomach also contained the skull of a larger fish species. Skull, skeleton, stomach content and a skin sample of each individual were collected for further study and deposited in the Boavista Reference Collection, maintained by PLS. Morphometrics of both specimens are given in Table 1.

The pygmy killer whale is distributed in tropical to warm-temperate oceanic waters worldwide, but its distribution is generally poorly understood and it remains one of the least known delphinids (Ross & Leatherwood 1994, Mead & Brownell 2005, Brownell *et al.* 2009). This is the first record of pygmy killer whale for the Cape Verde Islands (cf. Hazevoet & Wenzel 2000, Hazevoet *et al.* 2010). A listing (without reference to source) for the Cape Verde Islands (Martin *et al.* 1992) is not considered valid due to the lack of supporting documentation. Elsewhere in West Africa, one was captured off Senegal (Cadenat 1958, Fraser 1960) and another off Ghana (Van Waerebeek *et al.* 2009). An alleged record from the island of Annobon in the Gulf of Guinea (Tormosov *et al.* 1980) is unsubstantiated (cf. Weir 2010).



Fig. 1. Ventral view of pygmy killer whale *Feresa attenuata*, adult female, Praia de Boa Esperança, Boavista, 10 February 2012 (Pedro López-Suárez).

| | BV01/2012 | BV02/2012 |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Total length | 210 | 214 |
| Rostrum-gape | 21 | 21 |
| Rostrum-eye | 27 | 26 |
| Rostrum-anterior insertion pectoral fin | 42 | 44 |
| Rostrum-anterior insertion dorsal fin | 96 | 97 |
| Girth posterior pectoral fin | 126 | 130 |
| Girth anterior dorsal fin | 127 | 132 |
| Girth urogenital area | 67 | 80 |
| Dorsal fin height | 24 | 20 |
| Pectoral fin length | 40 | 42 |
| Pectoral fin maximum width | 16 | 16 |
| Tail fluke width | 55 | 56 |
| Tooth counts LL UL LR UR | 12 10 12 10 | 12 10 12 10 |

Table 1. Morphometrics of two adult female pygmy killer whales *Feresa attenuata* stranded on Boavista, Cape Verde Islands, 10 February 2012. Measurements in cm.



Fig. 2. Head view of pygmy killer whale *Feresa attenuata*, adult female, Praia de Boa Esperança, Boavista, 10 February 2012 (Pedro López-Suárez).

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