

## A NOTE ON THE WHALES FREQUENTING SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS.

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(With Plate I.)

The number of species of Whales frequenting our coasts is still under discussion. It seems desirable to mention here those that have come under any observations, leaving for another more elaborate note an account of notes and observations on their peculiarities and etiology.

Apart from the Cachalot or Sperm Whale, found in all the warm seas, we have two True Whales, five Fin-Whales and one Hump-back Whale.

The True Whales are :

(1) *Balaena australis*, the True Whale, which has not been met apparently south of lat. 60° S. It is not common by any means on our coasts. In former years the females of those met either in False Bay or Table Bay were either heavy in calf or accompanied by their offspring.

(2) *Neobalaena marginata*, the Pigmy Whale. It is a small species from the Australian, New Zealand and South American seas. Some three years ago a male, 11 ft. in length, was captured in False Bay. The skeleton is in our Museum. It is the first time, as far as I know, that this rare whale has been recorded in our latitude.

The Fin-Whales or Rorquals are : (1) *Balaenoptera musculus*, also known as *B. sibbaldi*, the Blue Whale. It is the largest animal alive, and probably the largest animal that ever appeared on earth. I have now trustworthy evidence of a measurement of 102 ft. 4 in., and of another example that was by several feet longer than the hauling slip of 100 ft. ; part of the tail was still in the water. We had last year presented to the Museum a pair of the lower jaws measuring 22 ft. 9 in. in the curve. The jaws of a 75 ft. skeleton of the same species measure 18 ft. 6 in., and the probability is that the former belonged to an animal near or possibly more than 100 ft. in length. It has a wide distribution, from the Northern to Southern Hemisphere.



(2) *Balaenoptera physalus* L., the Rorqual of the French, Rohrval of the Norwegian, Finner or Common Fin Whale of the English. This species does not reach the size of the Blue Whale. It measures from 40 to 70 ft., rarely exceeding this figure. It is abundant throughout the more northern seas of Europe and appears to be so in the southern seas or Antarctic.

(3) *Balaenoptera borealis* Less., the Fin-Whale or Herring-Whale, also Rudolphi's Whale, Sijhval or Seihwal of the Norwegian, Northern Rorqual of the French.

Its greatest length appears to be 45 to 50 ft. The animal was considered as rare in the Northern Hemisphere. It occurs also round the South Shetland and South Orkneys, and Amundsen met with a great number near the ice barrier. It is, therefore, the Whale that reaches furthest south.

(4) *Balaenoptera brydei* Ols. This species is very closely allied in general appearance to *B. borealis*, but the differences pointed out by Mr. Olsen have to a certain extent been verified by me or tally with information obtained from other quarters. It may be said to be more essentially ichthyophagous along our coast than even *B. borealis*; this seems to be borne out by the consistency of the fringe of the baleen, which is much coarser than that of *B. borealis*, itself an ichthyophagous species like *B. physalus* and *B. musculus*, none of these "finners" being planctonophagous, except perhaps occasionally. In fact the identity of the animal as differing from *B. borealis* was caused through a court-case about the fineness of this fringe which had been sold as that of the Seihval, the Norwegian name for *B. borealis*. The asymmetry of skeletons of Cetacea is extremely great—not so great, however, as to allow of such disparity of form of the breast-bone between *B. borealis* and *B. brydei*, as shown in the illustration, which is, I believe, noted here for the first time.

This Bryde's Whale frequents our coast for a much longer period than any of the others. Its partiality for a fish diet may induce it to remain here for, it may be, the whole year. It has not been noted in the Antarctic, nor, do I believe, has it been met near the Equator.

(5) *Balaenoptera acuto-rostrata*, Lesser Fin-Whale, or Pike-Whale of the English, and Minkeval of the Norwegian. The identity of the species of this name occurring in the northern waters of Europe and America with that of the animal found south as far as lat. 70 S. is still doubtful. Liouville (Charcot's Expedition) has not met with it. Racovitza (Belgica Expedition) has seen it twice, but has not noticed the white band on the pectoral fin—a most noticeable feature of the species. Kristensen and Klug (Antarctic Expedition) have seen one and captured another, but neither mentions the very striking band of the pectoral fin. In this case the stomach of the captured example was full of red shrimps (*Euphausia*). *B. acuto-rostrata* is eminently ichthyophagous. Lillie (Terra Nova Expedition) says, on the other hand: "When sailing in Antarctic waters to the



south of lat. 64° S. scarcely a day passed without our getting a sight of one of these whales." But is it *acuto-rostrata* or *bonaerensis* Burm.?

In the reference given by Lillie as to the identity of the animal I read that no example was secured. The identification is thus one of sight—at close quarters it is true. As to the evidence quoted by him by Norwegian whalers that the "Minkehval," which is their name for *B. acuto-rostrata*, is shot off the South Shetlands during the whaling season, I put little reliance upon it from my experience here with Norwegian whalers.

But the fact remains that on the shores of Table Bay was stranded four years ago an undoubted example of a 12-ft.-long juvenile *Balaenoptera acuto-rostrata* with the typical white band on the pectoral fin. The skeleton is now in the Museum.

With the evidence of the Antarctic I prefer to consider it as yet a roamer from the North.

*Megaptera longimana*, or *M. boops*, Hump-back Whale. We have in this animal a whale of quite different build and not reaching more than 50 ft., if ever so much. Liouville, however, mentions 58 ft. 6 in. The species is probably carcinophagous; some Cape examples have been found to be partly ichthyophagous. Incidentally the animal has an os-penis—a thing unknown among other whales.

The fact is now well established according to my lights and observations that certain northern whales are specifically identical with the southern whales, and are the kinds of whales found on our coast. That they are migrants, perhaps with the exception of *B. brydei*, is a well-established fact, but what is probably less known is that the animals go to warmer equatorial waters to breed or calve. If they are intercepted on their way there from the Antarctic or on their return to the Antarctic, the multiplication of the species will be greatly hindered, to say the least.

At the present day the whaling industry in the South Polar Circle has attained such dimensions that unless checked or regulated one may well speculate on the time left for survival of the Hump-back, Blue Whale, Fin-Whale, Seiwhal and Bryde's Whale, etc., frequenting our waters. One vessel in the south, during the six months' whaling season, may capture more than 300 animals. The total number caught off South Georgia and the South Shetlands together is said to have exceeded 10,000 in one year. As stated before, the whales frequenting our coasts are travellers to or from the equatorial waters where they resort for calving; in each of the three species principally hunted in the south the pairing season is at its height when the whaling season is either slackening or not carried on, and that if these whales are to be protected during their breeding season on behalf of the future of the whaling industry it must be done further north than South Georgia. Even here the number of captured Hump-backs is almost negligible, as is admitted by all whaling people. Most of them ascribe the



fact to their having become more wary. Is it not more likely due to the fact of their destruction in large numbers in the south? In the first days of subantarctic whaling the Hump-back constituted nearly the whole catch, even more than 96 per cent. in 1910-11. It was reduced to 478—about 18 per cent.—in the same locality in 1913-14.

People interested here in the whaling industry admit that some measure of protection is necessary.



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