

OCCURRENCE OF THE HARBOR PORPOISE AT POINT BARROW, ALASKA

On August 6, 1952, Professor Ira L. Wiggins, Director of the Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow, Alaska, acquired from David Otoana, an Eskimo fisherman, an adult female harbor porpoise, *Phocoena vomerina* (Gill), caught that same day by Otoana in his fish net in the northwestern extremity of Elson Lagoon at latitude $71^{\circ} 20' 45''$ North and longitude $156^{\circ} 35' 30''$ West. The animal weighed 109 pounds and Mr. Norman J. Wilimovsky recorded its length as 162 cm. from the snout to the base of the tail-notch. The specimen was prepared as a skeleton and is preserved in the United States National Museum with catalogue number 294800.

On August 23 at the same place, Clay Kaigelak, an Eskimo, obtained another porpoise,

of the same species, by striking it with the butt of his rifle. The porpoise was in shallow water and was seen first by Kaigelak's ten-year-old son. On September 2, 1952, when we were in Barrow Village, Kaigelak described the "little whale" to our companion, Edward G. Campbell, and remarked that it was the first one he had seen. We accompanied Kaigelak to his meat house, a frame structure 12 x 14 feet. There he opened a trap-door in the floor, then a second trap-door two and a half feet below the first, and hauled up a rope on the end of which the porpoise was suspended. It was solidly frozen, having been in the earthen cavity that Kaigelak had hollowed out of the permanently frozen ground. He willingly sold the specimen when we mentioned its usefulness to the Arctic Research Laboratory, and added that he had hardly known what to do with the animal and so had concluded that he would eat it.

This young calf weighed only $22\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, measured 92.4 cm. along the curve of the back from the tip of the snout to the base of the notch between the caudal flippers, had a notably deep head (vertically) as is characteristic of the foetus of this species (see Figs. 28-30, Scheffer and Slipp, Amer. Midl. Nat., 39: 294, 1948) and on the venter, anterior to the genital opening, there was an aperture (slit) that had accommodated the umbilical cord. The porpoise seemed to have been only a few weeks, or possibly a few days, old when killed.

Each of two other Eskimos from Point Barrow with whom we talked at the Arctic Research Laboratory was familiar with porpoises, and said that the Eskimos made no special efforts to obtain them. One of these men, Adam Levitt, thought that the porpoises occurred regularly at Point Barrow, stated that the back straps were the best part of the animal to eat, that he had eaten part of another early this (1952) summer, and wrote the Eskimo name of the animal as *Ah-vi-sauk*.

The stomach of the adult, according to Norman J. Wilimovsky, contained bones of whitefish, *Leucichthys*. The stomach of the calf was empty.

The calf was preserved in formaldehyde and is catalogued in the United States National Museum as number 294801. We are indebted to Dr. Remington Kellogg, Director of that museum, for verifying our field identification as harbor porpoise.

Although we have not thoroughly searched the literature, we know of no previous record of this species from so far north in North America as Point Barrow, Alaska. Because of the immaturity of the second specimen, we suppose that some young of the harbor porpoise are born on the Arctic Coast of Alaska.—E. RAYMOND HALL AND JAMES W. BEE, *Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. Received December 3, 1952.*

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