



Nota breve | Short note

Stranding and sighting records of Gervais' beaked whale in Cabo Verde

Wojtek Bachara^{1*}, Simon Berrow^{2,3}, Pedro López Suárez³, Denis Dias⁴ & Sara S. Ratão⁵

¹ PO Box 555, 05-120 Legionowo, Poland

² Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Merchants Quay, Kilrush, Co Clare, Ireland

³ Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Galway, Ireland

³ Bios CV, Sal Rei, Boa Vista, Cabo Verde

⁵ Fundação Maio Biodiversidade (FMB), Maio, Cabo Verde

*Corresponding author e-mail: ziphiid@gmail.com

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Gervais' beaked whale *Mesoplodon europaeus* (Gervais, 1855) is restricted to the Atlantic Ocean. Although most records are from the North Atlantic, it is probably continuously distributed in deep warm waters around the equator (Mead 1989, Norman & Mead 2001). Its occurrence in West Africa is poorly known, as records are rare. It is classified as Data Deficient (Taylor *et al.* 2008). There were 303 strandings worldwide, involving 326 whales (Koenen *et al.* 2013, Bachara & Norman 2014). Like most other members of the genus, most of our knowledge comes from stranded animals. Stranding hotspots are in the USA and the Canary Islands (MacLeod 2000, Bachara & Norman 2014, V. Martin pers. comm.). There were several recent strandings in the Caribbean and Central America, including first records for Costa

Rica, Montserrat, and Saint Lucia (W. Bachara unpub. data). Regarding sightings in West Africa, on 10 September 2012 a group of three Gervais' beaked whales were reported 300 miles west of Casablanca (Smithsonian 2007).

In Cabo Verde four beaked whales were seen off southern Sal Island on 11 February 2010, another four (including one calf) near Praia, Santiago Island, on 8 September 2014, and a single individual north of Santa Maria Islet on 12 October 2017 (Hazevoet *et al.* 2010, Berrow *et al.* 2015, Ryan & Greenfelder 2017). All were tentatively identified as *Mesoplodon cf. europaeus*. Here we present some unpublished records to improve our knowledge on the distribution of this elusive species in Cabo Verde.

On 15 May 2013 and 26 August 2016 decomposed *Mesoplodon europaeus* were found stranded on Maio Island (Koenen *et al.* 2013), and on 1 October 2017, 19 February 2018, and 5 May 2019, a male, a female, and a male together with a female were found dead on Santiago, Boavista and Maio islands,

respectively (Table 1). On 26 September 2017, an individual of unknown sex stranded alive on Boavista Island, was refloated and pushed out to sea by locals, but its fate is unknown. On 21 January 2017, a group of three individuals were seen 240 miles southwest of Brava Island (Fig. 1).

Table 1. Details of the strandings of *Mesoplodon europaeus* in Cabo Verde. Asterisk (*) stands for estimated total length.

Date	Island	Locality	Sex	Total length (m)
15/05/2013	Maio	Calheta de Baixo	Male	3.80 *
26/08/2016	Maio	Praia de Ribeira Funda, Ribeira D. João	Unknown	2.84
26/09/2017	Boavista	Praia de Varandinha	Unknown	-
01/10/2017	Santiago	Farol de leste, Praia de São Francisco	Male	-
19/02/2018	Boavista	Santa Mónica	Female	4.65
05/05/2018	Maio	Praia de Santana	Male	3.90
05/05/2018	Maio	Praia de Santana	Female	4.60



Fig. 1. Three Gervais' beaked whales seen off Brava Island on 21 January 2017 (photo by G. Mucientes Sandoval).

This is the first confirmed sighting of the species in offshore waters of Cabo Verde. All individuals were identified as Gervais' beaked whales, based on the small-sized forehead, which is defined posteriorly by the indentation at the blowhole and a melon which merges seamlessly to the narrow, moderate length

rostrum (Smithsonian 2007). This short note reports on sightings and strandings of the very poorly known Gervais' beaked whale, and suggests that Cabo Verde may provide important habitats for the species in the North Atlantic.

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