

Observations of cetaceans in the Gulf of Aden and the northwestern part of the Arabian Sea. Morskoe Mlekopitayushchie. Moscow. Izd-vo "Nauka", 1969.

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This is a brief report on the results of visual observations of marine mammals which was done from the side of a whale catcher of the Sovetskaya Ukraina fleet.

As is known, whale catchers engaged in scientific research go to sea earlier than the fleet and conduct their investigations outside of the fleet's commercial whaling area. This very circumstance allowed us to observe the behavior of a number of cetaceans in the area of the Gulf of Aden and in the northwestern part of the Arabian Sea. The observations were made during the 1964-1965 whaling season from October to December inclusively.

Throughout the observation period in the Gulf of Aden we repeatedly noted groups of sperm whale, Physeter catodon L. (six to ten animals), and representatives of the Balaenopteridae: blue whales, B. musculus L. and Bryde's whales, B. edeni.

We saw schools of fish, dolphins and small cetaceans: killer whales, Orcinus, and pilot whales, Globicephalus in all areas of the Gulf. The latter were the most numerous in the northwestern part of the Arabian Sea. Here, we counted killer whales, dolphins and pilot whales in groups of over 200 to 300 animals. We could see that as the dolphins were pursuing the fish they in turn became the food object of the killer whales.

As in the Gulf of Aden, sperm whales were the most frequently encountered

whale in the Arabian Sea. Their groups, apparently, consisted of females and small whales which is typical for the warm zones of the ocean. We observed sperm whales near the shores and in the open part of the Arabian Sea.

We did not see large (so-called harem) males. Close to the shore near islands we more often noticed rorquals. Along the Oman coast, and southeast of Cape Guardafui we saw pygmy blue whales and also Bryde's whales. We had previously seen pygmy bluewhales in the warm zone of the Indian Ocean. We observed pygmy blue whales in the Gulf of Aden waters near the coast of Somalia. There was a small group of five to six animals and also one solitary animal. The pygmy blue whales and Bryde's whales were often turned on their side quietly foraging among schools of fish and crustacean accumulations. It was obvious to us that these whales who ate fish so close to the Somalian coast interfered with the fishing done by the local population.

On the whole about 600 whales were recorded during the period of observation, not counting the smaller cetaceans. East of Cape Ras-Fartak we saw small groups of humpback whales (Megaptera nodosa). While observing the behavior of whales we noticed that Bryde's whales would blow one to three times and then dive for 10-20 minutes.

Pygmy blue whales would blow several times before they dived and then dive to a small depth. The interval between surface dives was 6-7 sec. The animals were clearly visible from the top of the rigging. After plunging in this manner pygmy blue whales would dive again (Table).



Table The dependency of residence time of pygmy whales under water on the preceding number of blows

	Number of observations												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Number of blows	5	5	7	5	5	4	4	6	5	7	8	5	4
Time under water (in minutes)	16	14	30	13	15	14	21	20	21	16	28	16	15

As is evident from the table, pygmy blue whales would blow no more than seven to eight times before plunging into a dive. The maximum amount of time under water did not exceed 30 minutes. With the last of a series of blows the pygmy blue whale begin to plunge. Slowly bending the spine the animal displays the dorsal fin and then the flukes. This is not usually done by blue whales in the Antarctic.

With respect to our data, various cetaceans were seen in the investigation area. An overwhelming majority of these cetaceans were numbers of smaller cetaceans and, typically for warm water, there were sperm whales. To a much lesser degree we saw rorquals, pygmy blue whale, Bryde's whales and humpback whales.

We got the impression that the various species of whales found in this zone of the ocean had an adequate supply of food (fish, cephalopods and crustaceans). Undoubtedly, one of the reasons that the rorquals gravitated towards the shore was their feeding at the abundant fish sites.

The data we obtained on the distribution and feeding of whales in the warm waters of the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean amplified previous information and data in literature with regard to the biology of a number of cetaceans.

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