

## STRANDING OF AN ANTARCTIC MINKE WHALE, *BALAENOPTERA BONAËRENSIS* BURMEISTER, 1867, ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA

Ana Carolina Oliveira de Meirelles<sup>1</sup> and Manuel Antônio de Andrade Furtado-Neto<sup>2</sup>

The Antarctic minke whale, *Balaenoptera bonaërensis*, occurs only in the Southern Hemisphere. Its distribution is apparently circumpolar between the Antarctic continent and New Zealand, Argentina, central Chile, Brazil, Angola, and Madagascar (Stewart and Leatherwood, 1985). Willianson (1975) analysed data obtained from minke whales captured by the Brazilian Fishing Company (*Companhia Brasileira de Pesca* - COPESBRA) that operated in Costinha (06°57'S, 34°51'W), northeastern Brazil, and indicated that some whales could be sighted as far north as the Calcanhar Cape (05°08'S, 35°30'W) - the northeastern corner of the South American continent - but they do not continue northwards towards northern Brazil and the Caribbean Sea. In a review paper by Zerbini *et al.* (1997) there were no records or sightings of minke whales in latitudes lower than 05°00'S.

On December 2000, a baleen whale in an advanced state of decomposition stranded between Taíba and Pecém beaches (03°32'34"S, 38°50'55"W), on central coast of Ceará state. The skull (AQUA203, Figure 1) was collected by local people and recovered by members of AQUASIS - *Associação de Pesquisa e Preservação de Ecossistemas Aquáticos*<sup>3</sup>.

The morphological features and morphometrical characters (Table 1) of the skull were analysed based on Omura (1975) and Zerbini and Simões-Lopes (2000) and identified the species as an Antarctic minke whale, *Balaenoptera bonaërensis*. It was verified that the interparietal was less exposed and was irregularly shaped, the anterior margin of the supraoccipital was convex and the parietals had no contact with the interparietal in the vertex (Figure 2). The anterior border of the frontals bends forward, while the hamular process of the pterygoids was short and robust. Basioccipital and basisphenoid, supraoccipital and exoccipitals, supraoccipital and parietals sutures were all obliterated, indicating that the animal was physically mature (Class III, according to Zerbini and Simões-Lopes, 2000).

This stranding record and one in Suriname (about 04°N, 56°W) (Husson, 1978) may suggest that the species distribution in the South Atlantic Ocean should be extended. However, additional information on the occurrence of minke whales in this area needs to be obtained - *e.g.*, through monitoring cruises - to confirm the wider range of the species distribution.



Figure 1. Dorsal view of the skull AQUA 203 (scale = 20cm).



Figure 2. Vertex of the skull showing the characters that differentiate the species of minke whales from the Southern Hemisphere (scale = 10cm).

<sup>1</sup> Associação de Pesquisa e Preservação de Ecossistemas Aquáticos (AQUASIS). SESC Iparana, Praia de Iparana s/n, Caucaia, CE 61600-000 Brazil. E-mail: cameirelles@yahoo.com.br

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal do Ceará, Departamento de Engenharia de Pesca, Campus do Pici. Avenida Mister Hull s/n, Pici, Fortaleza, CE 60.035-000 Brazil. E-mail: mfurtado99@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> AQUASIS is an association for the conservation of the aquatic environment based in Caucaia, Ceará State, Brazil.

**Table 1.** Skull measurements of an Antarctic minke whale from Ceara State compared with the intervals indicated by Zerbini and Simões-Lopes (2000) for cranial maturity Class III individuals.

MEASUREMENT (mm)	ZERBINI AND SIMÕES-LOPES (2000)	ANTARCTIC MINKE WHALE
	CLASS III ANTARCTIC MINKE WHALE	FROM CEARÁ STATE
Length of nasals (median)	130.51 - 206.38	135.8
Breadth of nasals (anterior)	95.03 - 142.26	74.4
Breadth of rostrum at base	618.14 - 805.83	635.0
Breadth across maxillares at nares	165.58 - 277.40	215.6
Breadth of frontals across nasals	165.58 - 277.4	228.0
Breadth between maxillaries at nares	211.65 - 323.47	172.0
Breadth of skull (squamosal)	1054.7 - 1336.65	1060.0
Breadth of skull (frontal)	965.80 - 1231.91	940.0
Breadth of skull (maxillaries)	935.61 - 1231.2	980.0
Length of orbit (R)	178.86 - 232.27	184.5
Length of orbit (L)	178.65 - 226.33	189.8
Breadth of exoccipital bone	745.54 - 1043.81	760.0
Breadth across occipital condyles	178.86 - 242.72	230.0
Height of occipital condyle (R)	109.97 - 147.01	127.2
Height of occipital condyle (L)	108.107 - 146.53	126.8
Breadth of foramen magnum	62.04 - 88.11	69.6
Height of foramen magnum	78.85 - 128.25	79.2
Length from foramen magnum to vertex	550.08 - 730.78	630.0

(R) right, (L) left.

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