

KILLER WHALE, ORCINUS ORCA (LINNAEUS) AND FALSE KILLER WHALE ,  
PSEUDORCA CRASSIDENS OWEN, IN THE ITALIAN SEAS °

by

Antonio DI NATALE and Antonia MANGANO

Istituto di Zoologia e di Anatomia Comparata  
 Università di Messina - 98100 Messina - Italia

SUMMARY

This note reports the new data about the presence of the killer whale, Orcinus orca, and false killer whale, Pseudorca crassidens, in the Italian seas. Both species seem rare and occasional in the Mediterranean Sea.

RESUME

Cette note reporte le peu de nouvelles jusqu'ici collectionnées du Projet Cetacea-Italie, au sujet de la présence de la faux-orque , Pseudorca crassidens, et de l'orque, Orcinus orca, dans les eaux italiennes. Pendant qu'il semble certaine la présence de ces espèces dans le Méditerranée centrale, il parait que l'occasionalité et la rareté en soit confirmée, due, probablement, à de défavorables conditions ambiantes.

The killer whale, Orcinus orca (Linnaeus, 1758) and the false killer whale, Pseudorca crassidens (Owen, 1846), are both two rare and occasional inhabitants of the Mediterranean sea, but are widely distributed in several oceans (LEATHERWOOD et al., 1976). The historical data are scarce like the present information and so no data are available about the biology of these two species in the Mediterranean Sea.

During the research carried out by Project Cetacea between July 1978 and September 1982, 5 records of killer whales (concerning 7 speci-

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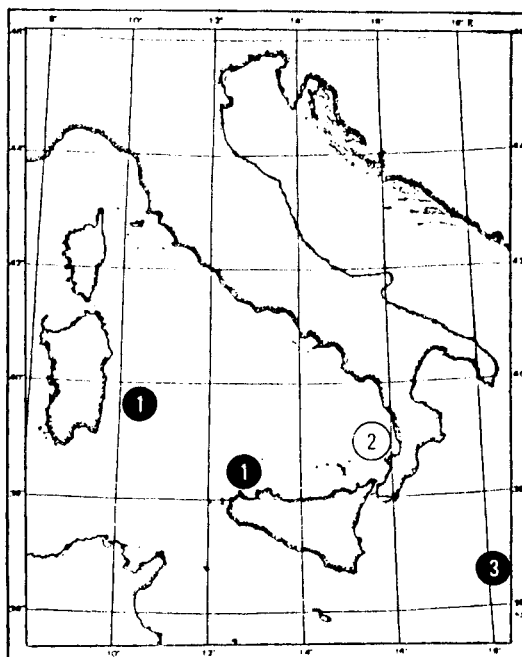
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mens) were collected; all of them are sightings, with the exception of one specimen, captured and killed by a "mandrague". The numerical composition of the pads is reported in the table below (white numbers), while the distribution in the Italian seas is shown on the map (white numbers).

specimens per school													
1	2	3	4	5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-100	101-500	>500
4	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
amount of records													

Nowadays, it seems that the killer whale is a species in regression, probably due to the lack of suitable preys (CASINOS & VERICAD, 1976).

The false killer whale seems more rare than O.orca: in fact, we have only one record in the Italian seas, concerning a couple of specimens captured by a drifting long line near the Calabrian coast (see black numbers on the map and in the table). Another record, but very old, is here to be noticed: it concerns a specimen killed and photographed near Catona (Jonian Sea, Calabrian coast), in 1925, probably captured by a net. The original picture was recently found in a warehouse of the Institute of Hydrobiology of the University of Messina.



It seems possible that the scarcity of information about this species could be due, besides to the low number of specimens in the Mediterranean Sea, to the difficulty of identification at sea.

#### REFERENCES

- CASINOS A., VERICAD J.R., 1976 - The Cetaceans of the Spanish coasts : a survey. Mammalia, 40, 2, 267-289.
- LEATHERWOOD S., CALDWELL D.K., WINN H.E., 1976 - Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises of the Western North Atlantic. NOAA Tech.Rep. NMFS CIRC-396, 176 pp.