

BIOLOGICAL AND DISTRIBUTION NEW DATA ON THE SPERM WHALE, PHYSETER  
MACROCEPHALUS L., IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA °

by

Antonio DI NATALE and Antonia MANGANO

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

SUMMARY

All the data concerning the sperm whale, Physeter macrocephalus, collected between 1978 and 1982 are reported in this paper. In particular, a distribution map of this species in the central Mediterranean Sea and a simple analysis of the composition of the schools are here reported.

RESUME

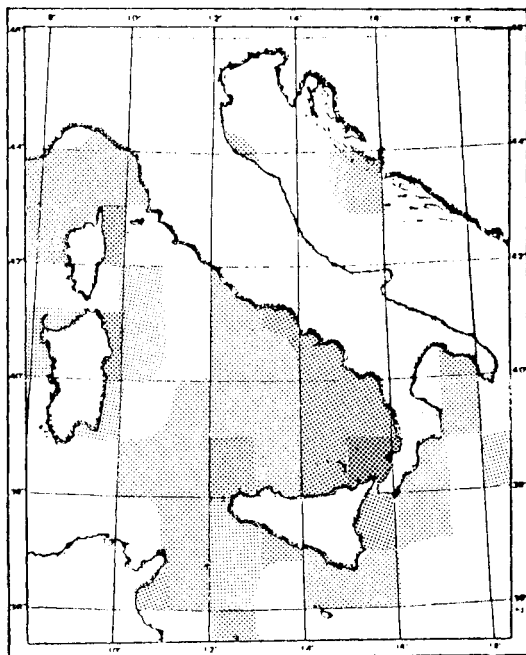
Les indications et les données qui concernent la biologie et la distribution du Cachalot (Physeter macrocephalus) collectionnées entre 1978 et 1982 sont reportées et commentées ici. Au total, on examine 207 signalations concernant 448 individus, repérés, échoués ou capturés. En particulier, dans le but d'essayer d'identifier une possible population Méditerranéenne, on fournit les indications inhérents aux périodes certaines de reproduction, les périodes pendant lesquelles les nouveaux-nés ont été signalés et la composition numérique des "écoles".

The sperm whale, Physeter macrocephalus Linneus 1758, is one of the best known cetaceans of the Mediterranean Sea (DI NATALE, 1979). Actually, after more than four years of research, we have 207 records, concerning 448 sperm whales. In particular, 165 records of sightings (concerning 400 specimens) have been collected; from these data, it has been possible to determine the up-to-date distribution of such species in the central Mediterranean Sea (show on the map) and the numerical composition of the schools, as reported in the table of the next page.

° This research is supported by the Italian Association for the WWF.

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
125	49	6	7	6	8	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
amount of records													

Coupling specimens have been noticed during May, June and September while calves or very young specimens are reported during the most part of the year, with the exclusion of March, April and December. The presence of sperm whales during all the months could support the hypothesis of a probable small mediterranean population or, in subordinate, the hypothesis of specimens which live inside the Mediterranean during several years. On the other hand, it seems sure



that a relative large number of sperm whales have a migration course inside the Mediterranean, coming from the Atlantic, maybe following the most important streams.

During the research, 19 strandings (concerning 20 specimens) and 23 captures (concerning 28 specimens) have been noticed; 20 specimens were captured by surface drifting nets, 1 by a gill net, 3 by trawl nets, 1 by a drifting long line, 1 by arpoons, 6 were killed by propellers of ships and 1 by explosives.

As easily shown, the incidence of human activities on the mortality of the sperm whale in the Italian seas is very high.

#### REFERENCE

- DI NATALE A., 1979 - Progress of research relating to Mediterranean Cetacea. Project Cetacea, special report, V. Annex to Mem. Biol. Mar. Ocean., IX (1-2), 50 pp.