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A Harbour Porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena* (Linnaeus, 1758), from the Mackenzie River delta, Northwest Territories, Canada (Notes on Cetacea, Delphinoidea VIII)

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ABSTRACT

A Harbour Porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*, taken from near Shallow Bay, Mackenzie River Delta, Northwest Territories (68°48' N 136°35' W) in July 1973 represents a range extension 800 km eastwards from the previous extreme northeastern record on the north Alaskan coast.

All 12 Harbour Porpoises so far examined from either the extreme north of the range of the species in the eastern North Pacific Ocean, or from the extreme south of the range in the eastern North Pacific and eastern North Atlantic Oceans, are large animals.

OBSERVATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION

In July 1973 a Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) was shot and killed by an Inuit hunter from Aklavik, in the Moose Channel, 12 km south of Shallow Bay (approx. 68°48' N, and 136°35' W) in the Mackenzie River delta, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Two porpoises were seen swimming and leaping out of the water together. The hunter fired and killed one, but the porpoise sank. Several weeks later the carcass was found washed up on shore. The head, flippers, flukes, and dorsal fin were removed and kept in an ice house until 17 September, 1974 when the skull was given to Hoek. It was sent to van Bree, who identified it as that of *Phocoena phocoena* (Linnaeus, 1758).

While studying the skull of this animal, we were struck by the great resemblance in skull dimensions between large Harbour Porpoises and full-grown Dall's Porpoises, *Phocoenoides dalli* (True, 1885), as shown in tables I and II. It was this resemblance that caused us some difficulties in identifying the skull. The differences in skull morphology were well expressed by True (1889: 124) while discussing *P. dalli*:

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“The skulls of *P. dalli* are remarkable for their short, flat beaks and great breadth between the orbits. The intermaxillae are higher in front of the nares than in *P. communis* [= *P. phocoena*], and nearly flat superiorly. The triangular area in front of the nares is raised above the level of the surrounding surface and the foramina on either side do not open into deep, narrow grooves as they do in *P. communis*. The intermaxillae are separated at their inner margins by a wide space, and at the bottom of the trough the vomer is plainly visible. The region of the skull between the nares and the occipital crest is nearly at right angles with the plane of the beak. The nasal bones have the form of two transverse, prominent bosses. The occipital bone is exceedingly large and broad, as compared with that of *P. communis*; the temporal fossae are small, and the squamosals are short and thick. The nares, both superior and inferior, are very large.”

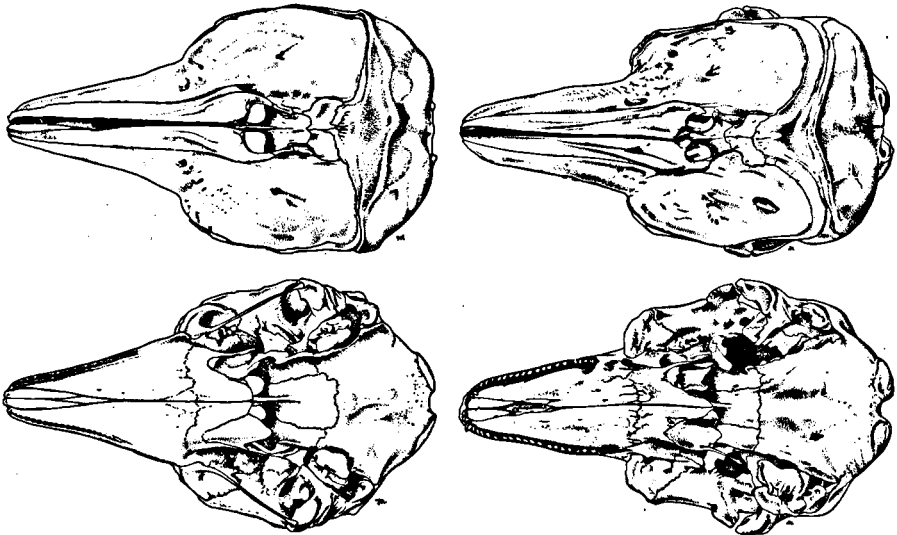


Fig. 1. Dorsal and ventral aspects of calvaria of *Phocoenoides dalli* and of *Phocoena phocoena*. At left *P. dalli*, ZMA 6063 (sex ?, caught N.E. of Japan, 1963, leg. M. Nishiwaki), at right *P. phocoena*, ZMA 8474 (♀, stranded on the island of Terschelling, the Netherlands, 18-VII-1965, leg. H. J. de Feyfer).

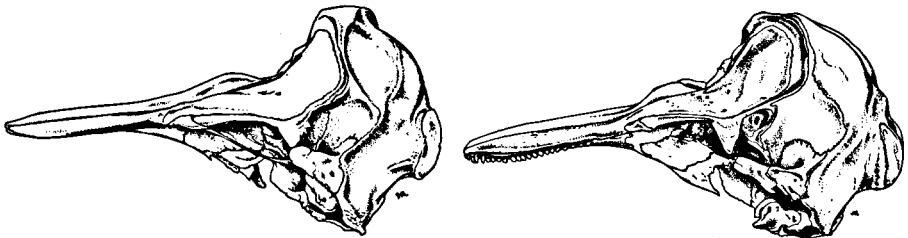


Fig. 2. Lateral aspects of calvaria of *Phocoenoides dalli* (at left) and of *Phocoena phocoena* (at right). For particulars, see legend of Fig. 1.

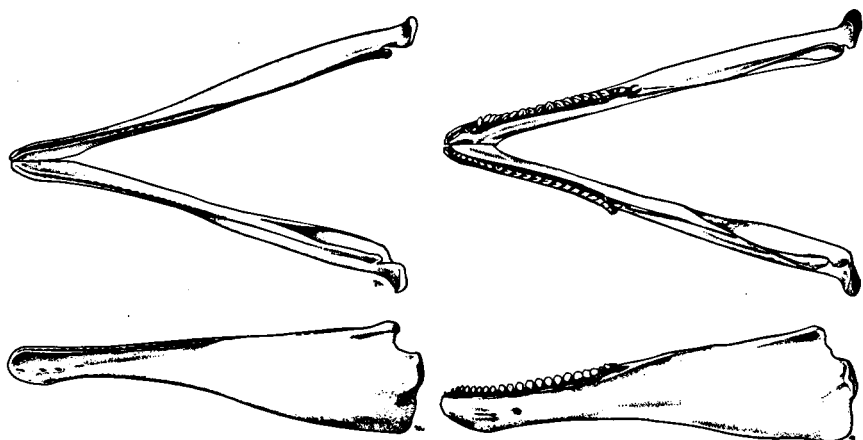


Fig. 3. Dorsal and lateral aspects of mandibles of *Phocoenoides dalli* (at left) and of *Phocoena phocoena* (at right). For particulars, see legend of Fig. 1. All drawings Jos Ruting (ZMA) fecit.

The species differences described by True can be seen in Figs. 1—3.

The skull measured 297 mm in length. That of the nearest previously collected *P. phocoena* female from Barrow, Alaska measured 291 mm and the animal was 162 cm in length. Our animal must therefore have measured about 170 cm. Van Bree (1973) gives maximal class lengths of 165 cm for 296 males, and 185 cm for 357 females, from North Atlantic (West European and Baltic) waters, lengths being given in 10-cm classes. Our animal was therefore large. Since the skull had no remaining teeth, we could not determine the sex by the method devised by van Utrecht (1969), assuming that the method is also valid for non-European specimens.

DISTRIBUTION

Phocoena phocoena at its northern limit in the North Pacific Ocean regularly reaches north Alaskan waters (see map in Gaskin *et al.* 1974), and has been previously recorded east to Point Barrow where an adult female and, a few days later, a newborn calf were taken in August 1952 (Hall & Bee 1954). The present record therefore represents a range extension 800 km eastward and adds a new species of sea mammal to the Canadian section of the Beaufort Sea.

DISCUSSION

Norris & McFarland (1958: 35) described three large Harbour Porpoises from off southern California. The skull of one animal had a condylobasal length of 290 mm and gave other evidence of old age. These authors stated: "These records seem to represent an extension of range due to unusual conditions, as the species is not a common resident until one goes

Table I. Measurements (in mm) of two skulls of Dall's Porpoise, *Phocoenoides dalli* (True, 1885) and of three skulls of Harbour Porpoises, *Phocoena phocoena* (Linnaeus, 1758).

| | <i>P. dalli</i> | | <i>P. phocoena</i> | | |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | ZMA ¹⁾ 6062 | ZMA ¹⁾ 6063 | Mac- kenzie delta | AMNH ²⁾ 100387 | KB- ³⁾ 16—72 |
| Total length of skull | 331 | 329 | 297 | 302 | 261 |
| Rostrum length | 141 | 132 | 131 | 128 | 114 |
| Rostrum basal width | 103 | 95 | 82 | 83 | 67 |
| Rostrum, width at its middle | 62 | 53 | 56 | 57 | 45 |
| Rostrum, width at 3/4 of its length | 42 | 36 | 41 | 43 | — |
| Breadth across pre-orbital angles of supra-orbital processes | 162 | 164 | 145 | 133 | 116 |
| Breadth across post-orbital angles of supra-orbital processes | 187 | 186 | 168 | 165 | 141 |
| Zygomatic width | 190 | 188 | 182 | — | 145 |
| Width of braincase across parietals | 170 | 175 | 145 | 140 | 127 |
| Maximum width of premaxillae | 53 | 49 | 39 | 37 | 33 |
| Length temporal fossa | 48 | 47 | 46 | 52 | 42 |
| Height temporal fossa | 31 | 37 | 41 | 52 | 32 |
| Tip rostrum-nares | 182 | 178 | 171 | 164 | 140 |
| Length of upper toothrow (right side) | 122 | 110 | 117 | 120 | 97 |
| Length of upper toothrow (left side) | 122 | 110 | 115 | 120 | 97 |
| Tip rostrum-pterygoid | 211 | 196 | 186 | 185 | 165 |
| Length mandible | 263 | 250 | 233 | — | 202 |
| Height mandible at coronoid | 64 | 61 | 61 | — | 45 |
| Symphysis mandibles (length) | 36 | 26 | 27 | — | 28 |
| Length of lower toothrow (right side) | 126 | 108 | 104 | — | 101 |
| Length of lower toothrow (left side) | 124 | 108 | 104 | — | 101 |

¹⁾ Zoological Museum, Amsterdam

²⁾ American Museum of Natural History

³⁾ Collected by Kenneth Balcom; in collection of W. F. Perrin, La Jolla

northwards to the vicinity of San Francisco Bay” and: “It is our feeling that these range extensions represent old animals that have wandered far beyond their normal range.”

In discussing the skulls of five Harbour Porpoises caught off Senegal and one from off Mauretania, West Africa, Fraser (1958) noted the exceptionally large size of the skulls of these animals. Condylbasal skull lengths of these five animals ranged from 280 to 300 mm (see his table I). Studies of the structure and number of the teeth, and of relative growth of the skulls, showed that these southern animals resembled typical northeast Atlantic *P. phocoena*, although the localities were somewhat to the south of the normal range.

Fraser, who had seen Norris & McFarland's paper in press, also deduced that the large West African specimens were old animals that had wandered south of their normal range ¹⁾.

¹⁾ D. E. Gaskin (in litt.), however, records a skull from Mauretania (BMNH 1968.1.12.1) of length 246 mm.

Table II. Dimensions in percentages of the condylobasal lengths (total lengths of skulls) of two skulls of *Phocoenoides dalli* and three skulls of *Phocoena phocoena*. See also table I.

| | <i>P. dalli</i> | | <i>P. phocoena</i> | | |
|---|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| | ZMA 6062 | ZMA 6063 | Mac- kenzie delta | AMNH 100387 | KB- 16-72 |
| Total length of skull | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Rostrum length | 42.6 | 40.1 | 44.1 | 42.4 | 43.7 |
| Rostrum basal width | 31.1 | 28.9 | 27.6 | 27.5 | 25.7 |
| Rostrum, width at its middle | 18.7 | 16.1 | 18.9 | 18.9 | 17.2 |
| Rostrum, width at ¼ of its length | 12.7 | 10.9 | 13.8 | 14.2 | — |
| Breadth across pre-orbital angles of supra-orbital processes | 48.9 | 49.8 | 48.8 | 44.0 | 44.4 |
| Breadth across post-orbital angles of supra-orbital processes | 56.5 | 56.5 | 56.6 | 54.6 | 54.0 |
| Zygomatic width | 57.4 | 57.1 | 61.3 | — | 55.6 |
| Width of braincase across parietals | 51.4 | 53.2 | 48.8 | 46.4 | 48.7 |
| Maximum width of premaxillae | 16.0 | 14.9 | 13.1 | 12.3 | 12.6 |
| Length temporal fossa | 14.5 | 14.3 | 15.5 | 17.2 | 16.1 |
| Height temporal fossa | 9.4 | 11.2 | 13.8 | 17.2 | 12.3 |
| Tip rostrum - nares | 55.0 | 54.1 | 57.6 | 54.3 | 53.6 |
| Length of upper tooththrow (right side) | 36.8 | 30.4 | 39.4 | 39.7 | 37.2 |
| Length of upper tooththrow (left side) | 36.8 | 33.4 | 38.7 | 39.7 | 37.2 |
| Tip rostrum - pterygoid | 63.7 | 59.6 | 62.6 | 61.3 | 63.2 |
| Length mandible | 79.4 | 76.0 | 78.4 | — | 77.4 |
| Height mandible at coronoid | 19.3 | 18.5 | 20.5 | — | 17.2 |
| Symphysis mandibles (length) | 10.9 | 7.9 | 9.1 | — | 10.7 |
| Length of lower tooththrow (right side) | 38.0 | 32.8 | 35.0 | — | 38.7 |
| Length of lower tooththrow (left side) | 37.5 | 32.8 | 35.0 | — | 38.7 |

The northernmost Pacific records of Harbour Porpoises also represent exceptionally large animals. For typical controls two female specimens of *P. phocoena* from Long Beach, Pacific Beach, and Iron Springs (47°09' N, 124°11' W), Washington State, USA measured 132.5 cm and 147 cm; three males 112, 113 and 133 cm, lengths which are commonly encountered. The skull of ♀ KB 16—72 from among this group, and included in table I, measured 261 mm in total length. But a Harbour Porpoise skull (AMNH 100387) from Yukon Island, Alaska (50°31' N, 151°30' W) has a length of 302 mm. A second, very badly damaged skull (AMNH 100388) from the same locality has a length of 280 mm. Although these are archaeological finds from Indian mounds we assume that they are valid for comparison provided that the climate has not radically changed. The total length of the skull of the female specimen of *P. phocoena* (USNM 294800) from Elson Point, Point Barrow, Alaska (71° N, 156° W), already mentioned above is 291 mm and, lastly, the skull from the Mackenzie River delta (69° N, 136° W) has a total length of 297 mm. With the exception of the first, all these values of skull length are reached only by old specimens.

Thus, although all three samples described from the extremes of the range

are small, totalling 5 from Africa, 3 from California and 4 from northern Alaska and Mackenzie, or 12 animals in all, it seems likely that mainly large adult Harbour Porpoises move to the northern and southern extremities of the species' range. The second, small Harbour Porpoise taken at Barrow in August 1952 was a newborn calf which does not invalidate this conclusion.

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