

2019 SMALL GRANT IN AID OF RESEARCH – FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

Assessing the species richness and relative abundance of cetaceans in Ghana: A social science perspective

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Collaborators:

Abstract

In Ghana, sporadic studies, although hampered by technical and logistic difficulties, have revealed that the country's waters are home to several cetacean species. Poor knowledge on cetacean population trends in this unique upwelling region, and high demand for cetacean products for human consumption may lead to a potential decline, which may go unnoticed. It is therefore required to quickly improve and implement viable data driven conservation measures directed to effectively address these unmanaged threats. This study was the first step in meeting this objective and its focus was on relying on local knowledge and sighting to map the cetacean richness and relative abundance in Ghanaian waters.

The study confirmed seventeen cetacean species were present which included, Common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), Clymene dolphin (*Stenella clymene*), Pantropical spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*), Pantropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*), Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), long-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus capensis*), Fraser's dolphin (*Lagenodelphis hosei*), Rough-toothed dolphin (*Steno bredanensis*), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), Melon-headed whale, (*Peponocephala electra*), Pygmy killer whale, (*Feresa attenuata*), Killer whale, (*Orcinus orca*), False killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*), Dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*), Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*), and the Humpback whale, (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Recent sighting has been rare for species such as Clymene dolphin, long beaked dolphin, pygmy killer whale and Cuvier beaked whale. Locals were familiar with the humpback whale and some western coastal communities could even pinpoint where at sea the humpback whales will appear at specific times within the year. A major stranding of sixty-three (63)

melon headed whales close to Axim in the western region, and the subsequent killing and attempted consumption of the carcasses by locals, highlighted the huge gap in local cetacean conservation knowledge and the low level of awareness on the significance of cetaceans to the fishing industry. Going forward, we will be assessing the causes of stranding and mapping out the stranding frequencies along the coast of Ghana in the past ten years.

Acknowledgement: Society for Marine Mammalogy, Rufford Small Grant, Environmental Protection Agency of Ghana, Fisheries Commission of Ghana, University of Ghana Zoology Museum.