

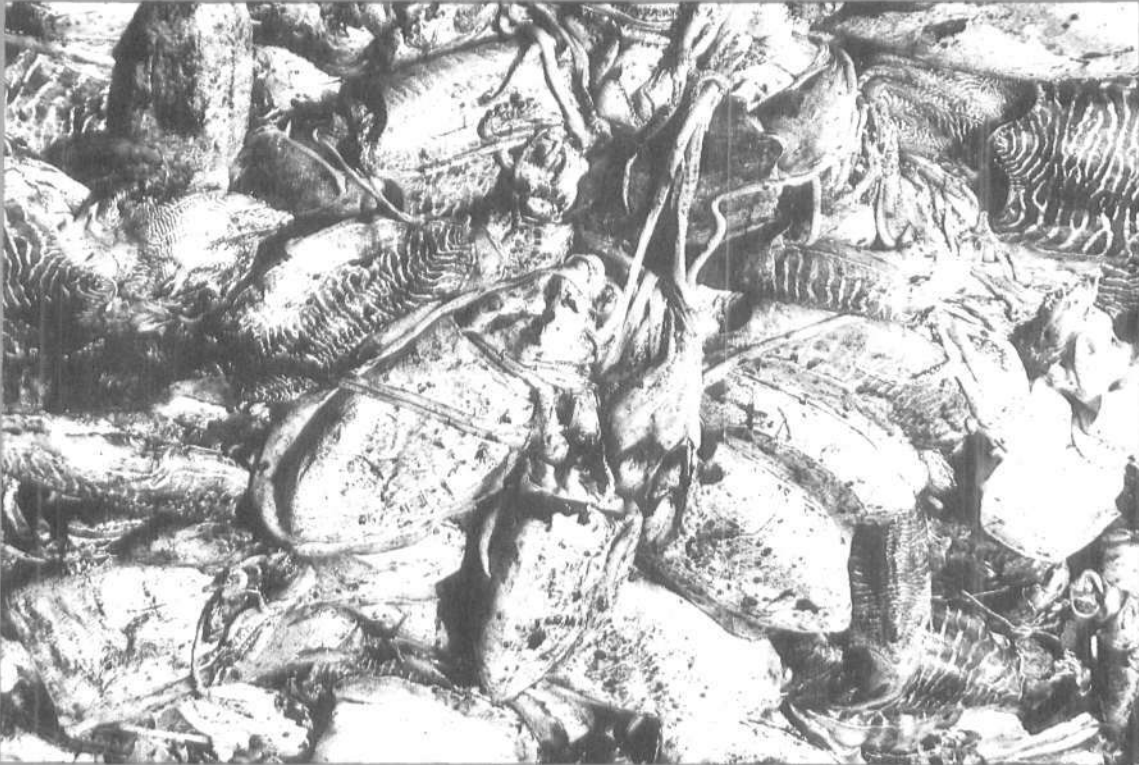


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INDIAN COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

ON THE LANDING OF WHALE SHARK RHINCODON TYPUS SMITH OFF MALPE, DAKSHINA KANNADA COAST *

Our Knowledge on the occurrence of whale shark in the Indian coastal waters had been summarised earlier in an exclusive issue of *Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv., T. & E. Ser. (No. 66, 37 pp.)* (Silas, 1986). It was concluded that the documentation of the occurrence of this species along with the location of capture, time, length, sex etc. over a period of time would assist in understanding the habits and natural history of this rare species, which has been used as an 'indicator species' of their forage resources such as sardines and anchovies in the neritic realm. Rao (1986; *Ibid.*) recorded the capture of 6 juveniles (4.9 - 7.9 m) of whale shark from this coast during the period Nov. - Dec., 1980.

On 13 December, 1990, one whale shark (juvenile, female) weighing 900 kg was captured by a 53 feet purse-seiner 11 km off Malpe at depth 36 m around 1000 hrs and landed at the Fisheries Harbour (Fig. 1). The fishermen reported that the shark was passively swimming near the surface following the fish shoals and on capturing it in the purse-seine, a noose was put around the caudal peduncle and the shark was towed to the shore with the help of carrier boat. It made lashing movements for about two hours on being landed to the beach. The morphometric data of the species are given in Table 1.

The reason for the entry of *R. typus* into the shallow coastal water is not understood at present. However, this species is normally a plankti-

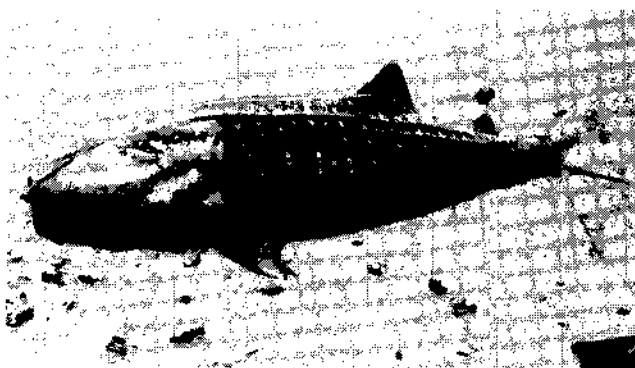


Fig. 1 Whale shark (*R. typus*) landed at Malpe. Measuring tape of 1.5m long is shown on the dorsum of the specimen.

vorous one with well developed gill apparatus for straining plankton; they are also known to feed on fishes such as anchovies and sardines. The gut contents of the whale shark observed consisted of juveniles of *Chirocentrus dorab* (40%), white baits (30%), parts of carangids (10%), stomach fluid and digested and unidentifiable mass of food (20%). No external parasites were seen.

Meat which weighed about 650 kg was auctioned for Rs. 500/- and the same was sliced into pieces of 50 X 30 cm. size and transported to Malappuram/Kozhikkode area preserved in ice, where the demand for shark meat is relatively high. Liver, which weighed about 65 kg was taken by the fishermen for oil extraction.

Dr. P. P. Pillai guided us both in the field and in the preparation of this note.

TABLE 1. *The morphometric data of the whale shark (in cm)*

Total length	:	465
Standard length	:	393
Length of head	:	112
Girth of body	:	230
Width of mouth from angle to angle	:	58
Eye diameter	:	2.8
Inter orbital distance	:	8.5
Snout to eye	:	47
Snout to first gill opening	:	99
Length of pectoral fin along the outer margin	:	74
Length of pelvic fin	:	32
Length of first dorsal fin	:	58
Length of second dorsal fin	:	24
Length of caudal fin	:	98
Vertical height of 1st dorsal fin	:	52
Vertical height of 2nd dorsal fin	:	24
Vertical height of anal fin	:	17
Snout to first dorsal fin	:	203
Snout to 2nd dorsal fin	:	305
Snout to pectoral fin	:	104
Snout to pelvic fin	:	226
Snout to anal fin	:	312
Snout to spiracle	:	52
Inter space between first & second dorsal fin	:	96
Anal & caudal fin	:	47
Orilns of pectoral fin	:	140
No. of body keets	:	3+1+3

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