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Stranding of a whale shark, *Rhincodon typus* (Smith) at Pamban, Gulf of Mannar

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The stranding of whale sharks in shallow waters along the Indian coast is not uncommon. Whale shark is listed as an endangered species as per the

IUCN Red List (2000). Locally the animal is called as “Panai meen”. On 20/10/2007, a male whale shark measuring 875 cm in length and weighing

approximately 2 t was stranded at Pamban (near Pamban Bridge), Gulf of Mannar. The specimen was found in dead condition and floating in the inshore waters with ventral side up. With the intervention and supervision of forest officials, it was towed ashore with the help of two vallams and was landed at Kundugal point. No injuries or wounds were found on the entire body. The forest department officials buried the animal on 22/10/2007 at the Kundugal beach itself with the help of an earth mover and decided to collect the entire skeleton system after 5 to 6 months to be preserved in the museum. The morphometric measurements (in cm) of the whale shark are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Morphometric measurements (cm) of the whale shark *Rhincodon typus*

Width of mouth from angle to angle	170
Anal fin length	50
Width of caudal fin from tip to tip	89
Distance from snout to origin of second dorsal fin	572.5
Distance from snout to origin of caudal	675
Distance from snout to origin of anal	567
Distance from snout to origin of pelvic	425
Distance from snout to origin of pectoral	200
Distance between origin of anal to origin of caudal	82

Length of pectoral along outer margin	147
Maximum circumference of body	520
Length of pectoral fin from the angle of inner base to tip	125.5
Length of pelvic fin along outer margin	54
Length of pelvic fin from the angle of inner base to tip	34.5
Width of pectoral fin from angle of inner base to inner base	67.4
Width of pelvic fin from angle of inner base to inner base	27
Width of anal fin from angle of inner base to inner base	45.2
Distance between origin of eye to origin of pectoral	140
Distance from snout to origin of eye	29
Distance between origin of eye to origin of first gill slit	108
Distance from snout to origin of first gill slit	130
Distance from snout to origin of fifth gill slit	187
Diameter of eye	4.0
Distance between 1 st and 2 nd gill slits	23
Length of clasper	35
Length of urinogenital opening	20
Length of upper caudal fin from origin to tip	162
Length of lower caudal fin from origin to tip	142
Approximate weight	2 t

Table 2. Report on instances of whale shark *Rhincodon typus* (smith) caught/stranded/sighted along the Indian coast.

Sl. No.	Date	Place	Nos.	Length (in cm)	Sex	Gear	Reference (Mar.Fish.Infor.Ser.)				
1.	6-3-87	Pudumanaikuppam (Chennai)	1	506	F	Gill net	No.	81:	P.	16,	1988
2.	Dec, 88	Panathura (Trivandrum)	1	606	F	Shore seine	No.	81:	P.	16,	1988
3.	Dec, 88	St. Andrews (Trivandrum)	1	---	M	Shore seine	No.	81:	P.	16,	1988
4.	18-4-88	Kottil padu (Kanyakumari Dt.)	3	732	--	--	No.	88:	P.	19-20,	1988
5.	11-2-89	Injambakkam (Chennai)	1	624	M	Gill net	No.	102:	P.	18-20,	1989
6.	14-5-89	Off Mahabalipuram	1	765	F	Trawl	No.	102:	P.	18-20,	1989
7.	25-7-89	Pirappan valasai (Palk Bay)	1	595	F	Shore seine	No.	142:	P.	15-16,	1996
8.	13-12-90	OffMalpe (Karnataka)	1	465	F	Purse seine	No.	110:	P.	10,	1991
9.	28-2-91	Off Bepore (Calicut)	1	327	M	Ring net	No.	110:	P.	11,	1991
10.	8-6-92	Dibbapalem (Visakhapatnam)	1	742	M	Gill net	No.	120:	P.	17,	1993
11.	30-7-92	Dibbapalem (Visakhapatnam)	1	548	M	Gill net	No.	120:	P.	17,	1993

12.	24-9-92	Athervedi palli palem (Kakinada)	1	445	M	Trawl	No.	120:	P.	17,	1993
13.	26-10-92	Athankarai (Palk Bay)	1	1022	M	Shore seine	No.	138:	P.	15,	1995
14.	16-3-93	Cooperage (Mumbai)	1	665	F	Gill net	No.	126:	P.	16,	1994
15.	15-4-93	Kayalpatnam (Tuticorin)	1	380	M	Gill net	No.	127:	P.	14,	1994
16.	13-3-94	Kovalam (Kanyakumari)	1	534	M	Gill net	No.	131:	P.	22,	1994
17.	Dec., 94	Vettukadu (Trivandrum)	1	550	--	Gill net	No.	143:	P.	27-28,	1996
18.	29-1-95	Vizhinjam	1	537	M	Gill net	No.	143:	P.	27-28,	1996
19.	3-3-95	Melamidalam (Kanyakumari)	1	457	M	Shore seine	No.	143:	P.	27-28,	1996
20.	30-9-95	Madabam (Ratnagiri)	1	2075	--	Washed ashore	No.	141:	P.	20,	1996
21.	7-2-96	Mayapatnam (Karnataka)	1	530	M	Gill net	No.	143:	P.	27,	1996
22.	3-3-96	Off Adimalathurai (Vizhinjam)	1	550	--	Sighted	No.	152:	P.	15,	1998
23.	3-3-96	Off Adimalathurai (Vizhinjam)	16	100	--	Sighted	No.	152:	P.	15,	1998
24.	19-6-96	Kaveripattinam (Tamil Nadu)	1	490	--	Bag net	No.	145:	P.	17,	1996
25.	2-3-97	Verramukkam (Srikakulam, Dt.)	1	550	--	Shore seine	No.	152:	P.	16,	1998
26.	2-3-97	Verramukkam (Srikakulam, Dt.)	1	570	M	Shore seine	No.	152:	P.	16,	1998
27.	2-3-97	Iskapalem (Srikakulam, Dt.)	1	580	F	Shore seine	No.	152:	P.	16,	1998
28.	27-3-97	Off Murdeshwara (Mangalore)	1	550		Trawl	No.	152:	P.	16,	1998
29.	4-11-97	Paradeep (Orissa)	1	669	F	Trawl	No.	155:	P.	20,	1998
30.	27-11-97	Off Manapad (Gulf of Mannar)	1	593		Gill net	No.	154:	P.	17,	1998
31.	17-4-98	Pamban	1	920		Gill net	No.	157:	P.	23,	1998
32.	21-12-99	Dakti (Thane, Maharastra)	1	625	--	Gill net	No.	170:	P.	12,	2001
33.	26-12-00	Malpe (Karnataka)	1	610	F	Purse seine	No.	171:	P.	9,	2002
34.	20-1-01	Pamban light house (Palk Bay)	1	688	M	Gill net	No.	174:	P.	12-13,	2002
35.	15-11-01	Calicut	1	94	M	Gill net	No.	176:	P.	9-10,	2003
36.	16-1-02	Pamban-therkuvadi (Gulf of Mannar)	1	1068	M	Pair trawl	No.	174:	P.	12-13,	2002
37.	23-8-02	Tuticorin	1	445	M	Gill net	No.	175:	P.	14,	2003
38.	26-12-02	Vizhinjam	1	97.5	--	Gill net	No.	175:	P.	11,	2003
39.	30-7-03	Tuticorin	1	478	M	Trawl	No.	180:	P.	14,	2004
40.	23-12-04	Versova (Mumbai)	1	1058	M	Trawl	No.	186:	P.	18,	2005

41.	20-6-05	Vizhinjam	1	800	F	<i>Ozhukuvala</i>	No.	184:	P.	16,	2005
42.	18-7-05	Kovalam (Chennai)	1	643.6	--	Gill net	No.	190:	P.	22,	2006
43.	11-1-06	Mandapam (Gulf of Mannar)	1	820	M	Pair trawl	No.	187:	P.	21,	2006
44.	7-7-06	Chennai harbour	1	810	M	Gill net	No.	189:	P.	25-26,	2006
45.	12-9-06	Sakthikulangara (Kerala)	1	445	M	trawl	No.	190:	P.	22,	2006

The exact reason for the entry of whale shark into the shallow coastal water is not known, however the shark being a slow swimmer, would have entered into the coastal inshore water through the deeper water channel between the islands during high tide and stranded leading to the death of the animal.

The occurrence of whale shark in the Indian coastal waters has been reviewed earlier (Silas, 1986). The updated information on whale shark stranded at different places along the Indian coast from 1986 are given in Table 2.

- o During the period 1986 - 2006, a maximum of 19 numbers of young ones of size below 100 cm were sighted / landed along the Indian coast.
- o It is obvious from Table 2 that a total of 26 whale sharks were landed/sighted in east coast with maximum of 6 numbers in 1997 and 36 numbers west coast with maximum of 5 numbers in 1988. Females were predominant in most of the instances.
- o It can be seen from Table that the maximum numbers were recorded during the month of March and December.