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ON THE STRANDING OF A HUMPBACK WHALE IN THE NORTH KERALA COAST*

On 20-1-1988, a huge dead whale was washed ashore at Mavila Kadappuram (beach) near Nileswaram (Kerala), about 105 km south of Mangalore (Figs. 1 & 2). After two days, it drifted back into the sea by tidal influence and appeared on 24-1-1988 at the barmouth area near Thaikadappuram. The carcass drifted deeper into the backwater by the incoming high tide.



Fig. 1. The stranded female baleen whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Borowski (Humpback whale) washed ashore on the 20th January, 1988 at Mavila Kadappuram (beach), near Nileswaram, Kasaragod, Kerala.

The carcass was in a mutilated and highly decomposed state. The whale was approximately 15-16 m in length and weighed about eight tonnes. The flippers were exceptionally larger, measuring 4.6 m in length and the distance between the extremities of caudal

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fluke was 4.5 m. Detailed measurements could not be made due to the decomposed state. The length of the flipper forming almost 1/3 of the total length confirms the identification of the whale as *Megaptera novaeangliae* Borowski.

It was an adult female. The ventral grooves extending almost near to the naval were mutilated (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Ventro-lateral view of the whale stranded at Mavila Kadappuram. Note the extent of throat grooves upto the naval.

The prominent and protruded genital aperture (Figs. 1 & 2) and developed mammary glands indicated that the animal might have released its young one before its death.

It was understood that people from the Kottakal Arya Vaidya Sala near Calicut visited the place on 24-1-1988 and examined the specimen by cutting the viscera presumably to collect the blubber or ambergris for medicinal purpose.

