



„Mysterious“ Cuvier's beaked whale, Marwick Bay 2018

Description

While visiting the Orkney Islands, Dr Catriona Macgregor and a group of other Americans on Marwick Bay (Mainland) found the rests of a 14 ft long and much decomposed sea creature.



Mysterious sea creature ashore at Marwick Bay, Mainland, Orkney Islands. Courtesy of Stacey Witt (2018).

"I was leading a group to see the puffins and there it was right on the beach, while initially humorously we thought may have been the pictish beast. We were extremely surprised and quite amazed and perplexed because of the fact it had fur." With her scientific background Dr Macgregor wanted to identify it and concluded finally that it's a Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*). Additionally she plans to analyze a sample of the "fur". *"I'am going to put it under a microscope and I would be surprised if it wasn't some sort of algae like organism, but if necessary we can run some DNA tests."* Chris MacLennan (2018) for Press and Journal published the complete story on June 1, 2018, with the title „Mysterious sea creature washed ashore in Orkney identified“. Appreciative the story includes finding and identification, while maybe it's somewhat mysterious why it's "mysterious"?



Dorsal view of the „furry“ carcass at Marwick Bay. Courtesy of Simon Treasure (2018).

Further research showed that the carcass is at the location at least since February 2018, while the state of decomposition shows that it even died some time before.

- Penny Martin (2018) posted five photos of the “*beaked whale on Marwick beach*” to the Facebook-group of Orkney Wildlife , three from its dorsal side and two of its head. The tube-shaped body in general, the very posterior dorsal fin, a blowhole and the “beak” of a family member of the beaked whales can be acknowledged. The “fur” on those pictures is only visible along the back, where the skin vanished and the underlying blubber and tissue began to break up.
- Two days later, on February 20, Orkney Travel published another picture of it but identified it as “*pilot whale*” (Pilot whale in Marwick Bay, 2018).



Head with exposed mandible (lower jaw) and two alveoli (tooth-sockets) at the tip. Courtesy of Simon Treasure (2018).

- Simon Treasure (2018) posted several pictures of the “*beaked toothed Cetacean family*” member in a more advanced state of decomposition on March 11. One photo shows the ventral side of the head and upper jaw, which is still covered from tissue. While the more exposed mandible (lower jaw) shows no sign of teeth, at the tip two alveoli (tooth-sockets) can be acknowledged. The position of those alveoli and the shape of the head identify it as *Z. cavirostris*. The skin nearly disappeared at all and so more or less the complete body – where still covered from tissue – is “furry”.
- The last set of photos so far came from Bobby Spence (2018) showing that in few weeks only the blank bones will be left.

Scottish Marine Animals Stranding Scheme (2018) was informed and examined it on February 16, 2018. It is registered in their database under number M102 / 18 SW2018/96 as Cuvier’s beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*).

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Stacey Witt and Simon Treasure for the granted right to use their photos of the carcass and Claire Jaycock for her help with contacts and research.

References

Pilot whale in Marwick Bay. (February 20, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/orkneytravel/photos/a.602498263280373.1073741828.602482029948663/785491871647677/>

MacLennan, C. (2018, June 1). Mysterious sea creature washed ashore in Orkney identified. Retrieved from <http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/islands/orkney/1487793/mysterious-sea-creature-washed-ashore-in-orkney-identified/>

Martin, P. (February 17, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/133013273445588/permalink/1658187814261452/>

Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme. (June 14, 2018). Retrieved from <http://www.strandings.org/cgi-bin/shortreport.pl?id=10235>

Spence, B. (June 4, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/319146308156563/permalink/1980338992037278/>

Treasure, S. (March 11, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/tiny.treasure/posts/10215742732980635>

Witt, S. (May 31, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10212309538948913&set=p.10212309538948913&type=3&permPage=1>

globsterblobsandmore.com