

Sperm whale tooth at Pulau Subar Laut

Subject: Sperm whale, *Physeter macrocephalus* (Mammalia: Cetacea: Physeteridae).

Subject identified by: Paolo Viscardi (Grant Museum of Zoology, United Kingdom).

Location, date and time: Singapore Strait, Sisters Islands Marine Park, Pulau Subar Laut, at small lagoon on west side; 25 November 2015; around 1730 hrs.

Habitat: Sandy beach in artificial lagoon, at middle part of intertidal zone (Fig. 1).

Observer: Contributor.

Observation: A tooth of 15.5 cm length and 5.5 cm width, and weighing around 400 grams (Fig. 2) was found exposed on the sand during low tide. No other whale remains were found at the site.

Remarks: The mandibular tooth specimen was collected and deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore under the catalogue number ZRC 4.10514.

The size of the tooth suggests that it was from an animal much larger than the 10.6 m long female sperm whale that was found dead off Jurong Island on 10 July 2015 (Tan, 2015). The tooth could possibly be from an adult male sperm whale. However, as there are signs of weathering on the tooth surface, it is not known if it came to be on the island's lagoon by natural means or was transported with material (such as sand) from outside Singapore used to reclaim the island between 1974 and 1975 (Chia et al., 1988).

References:

- Chia L.S., H. Khan & L. M. Chou, 1988. *The Coastal Environmental Profile of Singapore*. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations/United States Coastal Resources Management Project. 92 pp.
- Tan, A., 2015. Dead sperm whale found off Jurong Island. *The Straits Times*. 11 July 2015: A1.



Fig. 1. Seaward view of the western lagoon at Pulau Subar Laut showing the intertidal zone at low tide. White arrow points to approximate location where the whale tooth was found. Photograph by Toh Chay Hoon



Fig. 2. Three views of the 15.5 cm sperm whale tooth found at Pulau Subar Laut. Top: side found exposed. Middle: side found embedded in sand. Bottom: slightly tilted, root end showing tooth cavity. Photographs by Kelvin K. P. Lim

Note: The contributors thank the National Parks Board for access to the Sisters Islands Marine Park, and permission to collect the specimen for identification and deposition at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

Contributors: **Toh** Chay Hoon & Marcus A. H. **Chua**

Contact address: nhmtohc@nus.edu.sg (Toh), marcuschua@nus.edu.sg (Chua)