

Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins near Jurong Island

Benjamin P. Y-H. Lee & Michelle Ooi

benjamin_lee@nparks.gov.sg, chiroptera.sg@gmail.com (Lee)

Subjects: Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphin, *Sousa chinensis* (Mammalia: Cetacea: Delphinidae).

Subjects identified by: Benjamin P. Y-H. Lee and Michelle Ooi.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, near Jurong Island. Sembcorp Marine Limited Tanjong Kling Yard, East Quay beside No. 3 dry dock; 18 November 2019 at 0827 hrs; and 10 March 2020 at around 1030 hrs.

Habitat: Marine. Near shore and highly modified coastline, surrounding water depth ≤ 15 m.

Observers: Benjamin P. Y-H. Lee, Michelle Ooi, Islam Aminul and Muhaimin bin Othman.

Observations: Two separate observations are herein recorded.

1. The light-coloured carcass of an Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphin was found floating in the waters of the East Quay on 10 March 2020 at around 1030 hrs. It was hoisted out of the water by the ground staff of the shipyard (Fig. 1). Benjamin Lee and Michelle Ooi received a call from the Animal Response Centre of the National Parks Board at about 1730 hrs about the carcass. They immediately went to the shipyard to examine and identify the carcass. By the time they reached the site, the dolphin had been placed in a small refuse tipper. While the carcass was relatively intact, the distal left flipper was missing, and it was partially eviscerated with its stomach hanging out from an opening in the ventral lower half of the abdomen. The flukes were not distinguishable, and they seemed to have been scavenged on. It is believed that the approximately 2.8 m long dolphin had been dead for a few days. The cause of death was unknown. The advanced decomposition of the carcass prevented its collection for further examination.
2. Two apparently adult individuals swimming in relatively clear waters (Fig. 2) in the East Quay were video-graphed by an anonymous personnel at the shipyard on 18 November 2019, at 0827 hrs.



Fig. 1. Ventral view of carcass. Photo by Islam Aminul



Fig. 2. Two dolphins in the East Quay on 18 November 2019. Screen grab from video by an anonymous personnel

Remarks: In Singapore, a carcass of an Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphin carcass was recovered at East Coast beach in July 2014 and its skeleton deposited in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore (Chua 2014). In September that same year, live examples were observed off Lazarus Island by Tay & Ong (2014). Although it is deemed the most commonly seen cetacean species in Singapore waters (Sigurdsson and Yang, 1990: 30-32), it seems peculiar to find live Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins at the shipyard.

According to Muhaimin bin Othman, a member of the shipyard staff, Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins were frequently seen in the waters off the shipyard. Where the live examples were swimming is effectively a sheltered inlet bounded by a causeway and both shipping and petrochemical industrial estates (personal observations). Their occurrence in such a highly urbanized marine environment could be due to fairly good water quality there as water pollution has been cited as a major threat to this locally 'endangered' dolphin (see Lim et al. 2008: 202). It has been shown that the waters around the southern coast of Singapore Island, despite being more industrialised, are less polluted in terms of bacteria, chemical tracers and pathogenic vibrios compared to the Johor Strait along the northern coast (Goh et al. 2017). This may explain why most sightings of this dolphin species has been in the Singapore Strait and the eastern Johor Strait (Sigurdsson & Yang 1990: 30-31; Tay & Ong 2014).

References:

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