

Letter to the Editor

A Northernmost Record of Dwarf Sperm Whale (*Kogia sima*) (Owen, 1866) from the Faroe Islands

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On 28 March 2008, a dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*) was observed swimming in the vicinity of the village of Haraldsund, close to the embankment between Borðoy and Kunoy. The position of the locality is 62.27° N, -7.00° W, and with a depth of 20 to 25 m.

The dwarf sperm whale was first observed in the area at around noon in company with a larger (4 to 5 m) unidentified whale, which left the area at once. The dwarf sperm whale stayed in the shallow water area for the remainder of the daylight hours that day, but the next morning it had left. The whale was estimated to be around 2.5 m in length.

Local people were able to get good quality pictures of the whale from which the species could be verified as a dwarf sperm whale (Figures 1 through 3). The coloration on the side of the head is clearly visible in the pictures, showing the dark patch around the eye and the pale area behind the eye (i.e., the “false gill”) and on the throat. The whale was identified to the genus *Kogia* due to its small size, the round head, undershot lower jaw, and the “false gill” mark. Identification to the species *K. sima* and not *K. breviceps* was caused by its small size and the larger, erected dorsal fin (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1989; Duguy, 1995).



Figure 1. © Nordlýsið



Figure 2. © Nordlýsið

This species is small, with a maximum length of 2.7 m. It can be very difficult to observe offshore and is mostly known from strandings. Moreover, it is a pelagic whale living in small groups seaward of the continental shelf, which reduces the chance of sightings (Dunphy-Daly et al., 2007).

There are seven previous records of dwarf sperm whales from the North Atlantic: Sable Island (2), Nova Scotia (1), Italy (1), Portugal (1), and France (2) (Duguy, 1995; Willis & Baird, 1998; Lucas & Hooker, 2000). This is the first time the species has been observed north of 60° N in either the Atlantic or the Pacific Oceans (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1989; Duguy, 1995). The species was not reported during the intensive North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) and Scandinavian and North Sea Surveys (SCANS-II, 2008; Cetacean Offshore Distribution and Abundance in the European Atlantic [CODA], 2009), nor during the 2008 T-NASS (North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission [NAMMCO], 2008).

With this observation, the number of different cetacean species observed or stranded in the Faroes region increases to 21 species (Bloch, 1998).



Figure 3. © *Norðlýsið*

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