



Beaches, bones and beasts: Searching for strandings in North-West Africa

Maren Reichelt & Mick Baines

Münchener Straße 108, 28215 Bremen, Germany

During an overland expedition from Germany to the Gambia and back (marked in red on map below), long stretches of beach in southern Morocco, Mauritania and the Gambia were searched for strandings. Five beaches were sampled on the southbound trip in December 2003 to February 2004. On the northbound journey in February and March 2004 four new beaches were sampled as well as three that had been visited on the way south. Overall, approximately 345 km of beach were sampled by car and between one and five km for each beach investigated on foot.



Three beaches, Southern Morocco



- Only short stretches sampled on foot.
- Old bones of large whales as well as three entire skulls of harbour porpoises.
- One stranded headless harbour porpoise.
- One dead Loggerhead turtle.

Boujdour, Southern Morocco

Several bones of harbour porpoises, including part of a jaw as the very first find of the expedition.



“Whalebone camp”, Southern Morocco

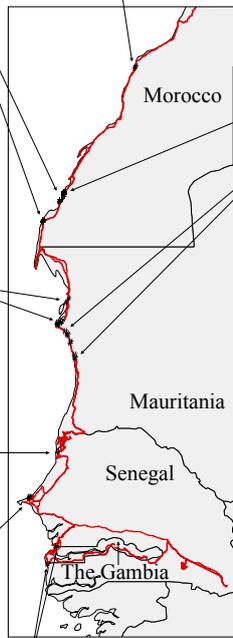
- Sampled on foot on south- and northbound trip.
- Overall 72 finds of bones including eight (partial) skulls, vertebrae, ribs and jaws of both small and large cetaceans.
- Remains of one decomposed harbour porpoise.
- Some turtle bones as well as the remains of one leatherback turtle.



Banc d’Arguin National Park, Mauritania



- Skeletons of several large baleen whales and skulls of dolphins displayed at NP headquarters in Nouamghar and Iwik.
- Remains of at least eight turtles in rubbish tip in small village.
- A further 13 turtles along the shores of Bay de St. Jean.



Beach piste, Mauritania

- Overall about 140 km of beach sampled by car each way.
- No whole carcasses recorded on the southbound trip, but three on the way north: one harbour porpoise, one unidentified dolphin (*Stenella* or *Delphinus* sp.) and one bottlenose dolphin, probably washed ashore by strong winds prevailing at the time. By-catch was suspected as a cause of death on the grounds of superficial injuries and proximity to fishing villages.
- Five dolphin skulls and one entire dolphin skeleton.
- One dead Leatherback turtle.



Senegal



- Skull of large whale on pavement outside a restaurant in the middle of St. Louis.
- Vertebrae of large whales and one dolphin skull in restaurant near Dakar.

Summary of skeletal finds



- Skeletal remains found on all beaches sampled.
- Particularly large quantities on relatively short stretches of beach in southern Morocco.
- Overall, 115 finds of cetacean bones consisting mainly of vertebrae, ribs, jaws and skulls. Sizes ranged from harbour porpoises to large baleen whales.
- Total of 25 entire skulls found: 5 harbour porpoises, 1 bottlenose dolphin, 14 unidentified dolphins and 5 unidentified large whales.

The Gambia

- Two beaches sampled.
- Only one cetacean scapula and cranium.
- Turtle bone with knife marks.



Turtles

- 28 finds of turtle remains from at least three species, ranging from single bones to entire freshly stranded animals.
- Largest concentration of finds was in the Banc d’Arguin NP, Mauritania.

Sightings of live cetaceans

- 2 harbour porpoises off Cap Blanc, Mauritania.
- 2 probable bottlenose dolphins in the Gambia River.
- 9-12 bottlenose dolphins off Cap Tagarit, Mauritania.

Interested in any of our data?
Email one of us:
maren.reichelt@wildscope.com
mick.baines@wildscope.com