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### FIRST RECORDS OF THE MELON-HEADED WHALE (*PEPONOCEPHALA ELECTRA*) FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO

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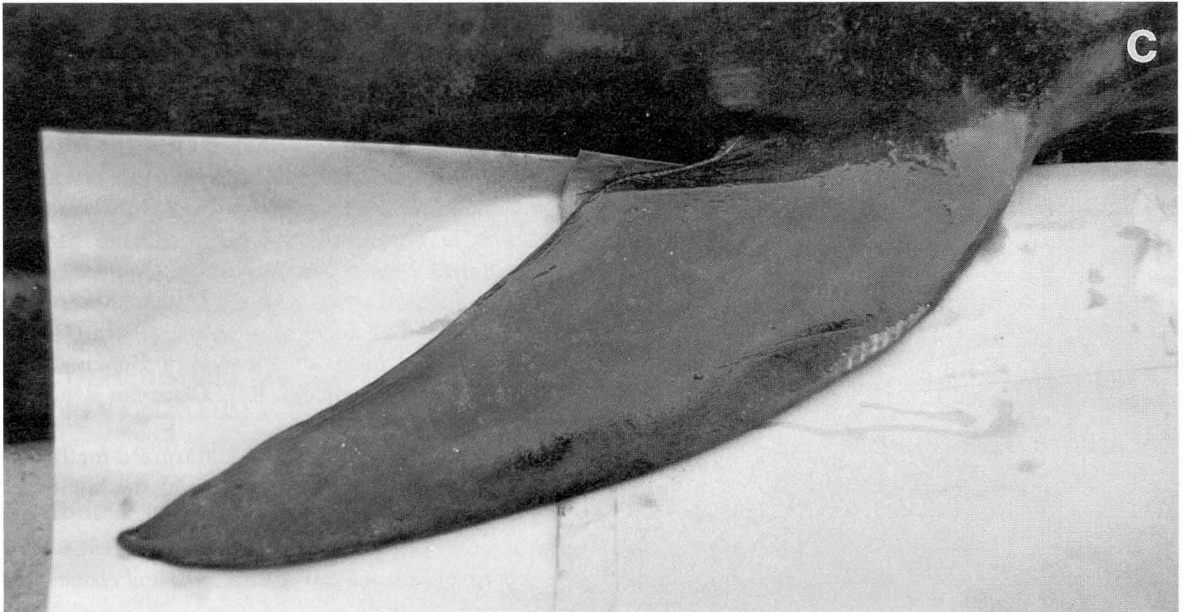
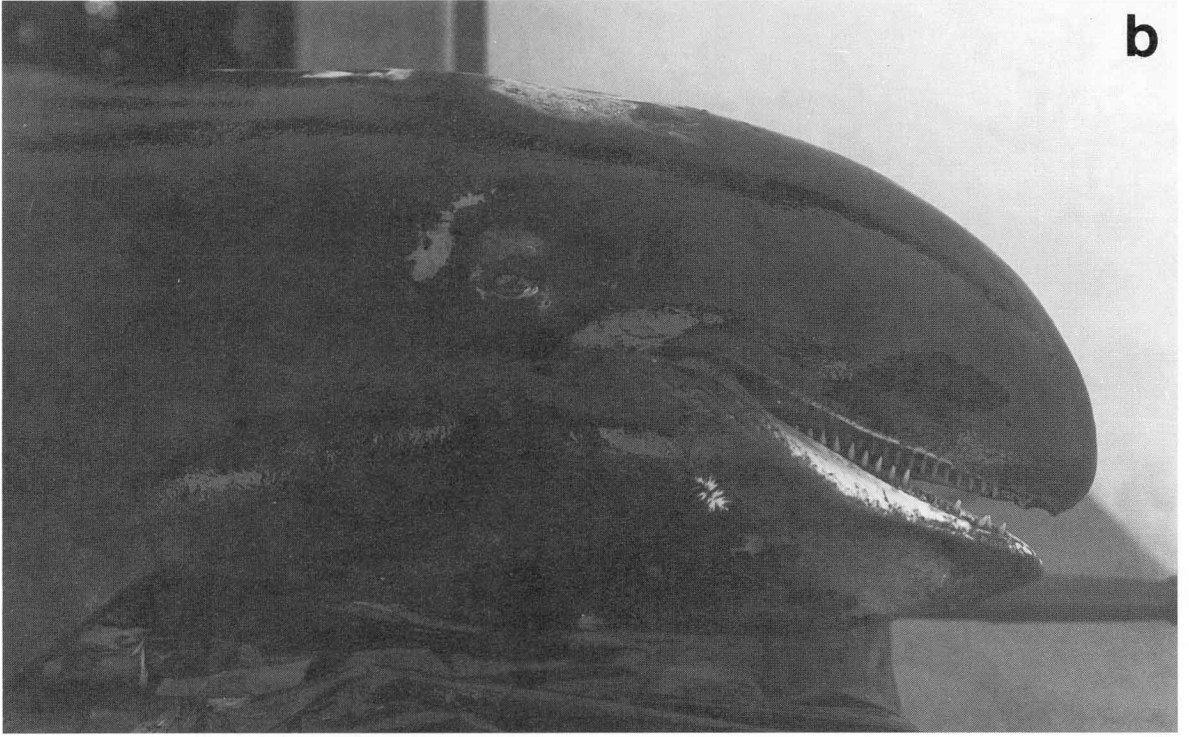
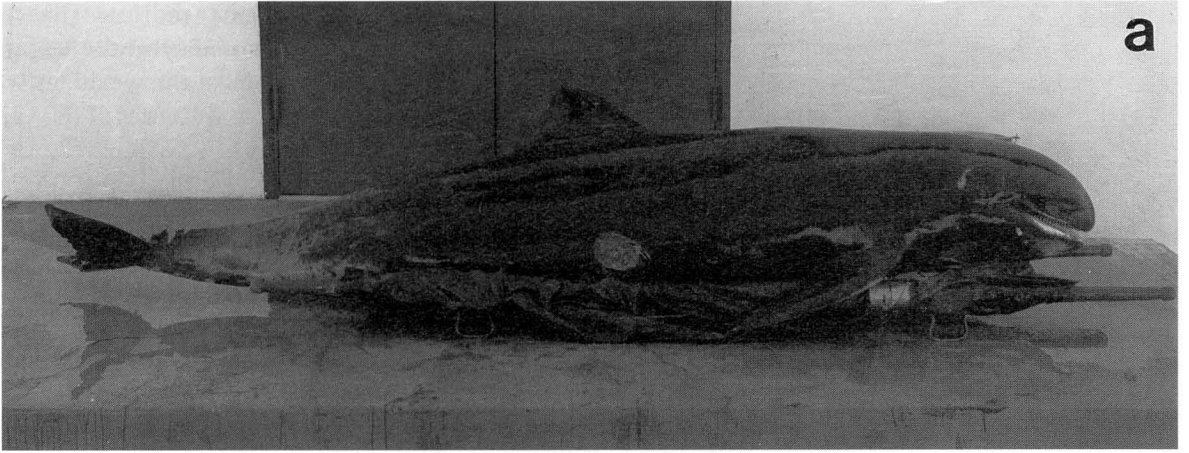
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The melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*) is a pelagic delphinid, similar in appearance to the pygmy killer whale (*Feresa attenuata*) and false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*). Perrin (1976) summarized world distribution records of the melon-headed whale, indicating a tropical and warm temperate range in the central and eastern Indian, eastern North Atlantic, and entire Pacific

oceans. Since that review, the known range has been expanded to the rest of the world's tropical and warm temperate waters, with the exception of the Gulf of Mexico (Caldwell et al., 1976; Best and Shaughnessy, 1981; Peddemors and Ross, 1988; Van Waerebeek et al., 1988; Lodi et al., 1990; Leatherwood et al., 1991). Although the westernmost North Atlantic record is from the

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FIG. 1—Melon-headed whale (TMMSN No. PO154) stranded on West Matagorda Peninsula, Texas: lateral view (a), lateral view of the head (b), and close-up of the right flipper (c).



coast of Maryland (Mead et al., in litt.), this species has been thought to be a likely part of the cetacean fauna of the Gulf of Mexico (Schmidly, 1981). This note reports on the first confirmed occurrences in the Gulf of Mexico.

Early on the morning of 22 June 1990, beachgoers discovered a small whale stranded alive on West Matagorda Peninsula, Texas (28°32'N, 96°08'W). The animal was returned to sea by onlookers at about 0830, but it immediately came back up on the beach. At about 1000, the whale was taken to deeper water and released; it righted itself and swam off. It was last seen alive about 400 m offshore, heading northeast. At approximately 1610, the whale was observed on the beach, apparently dead. This was confirmed by Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network (TMMSN) personnel when they arrived at 1930.

Upon detailed examination by the authors, approximately 24 hours after death, the animal (TMMSN No. PO154) was identified as a male melon-headed whale, with a total length of 264.5 cm. Tooth counts were 20UR, 20UL, 19LR, and 19LL. Identification was based on tooth counts, head shape, and flipper shape (Fig. 1). Tooth counts alone allowed it to be distinguished from pygmy and false killer whales, both of which have counts of less than 15 teeth per tooth row (Leatherwood et al., 1976; Perryman et al., in press). External measurements in centimeters are as follows (numbers in parentheses are numbers in Norris, 1961): snout to center of eye (2), 33.5; length of gape (4), 24.0; center of eye to angle of gape (7), 8.0; center of eye to center of blowhole (8), 25.0; snout to center of blowhole (9), 29.0; snout to flipper (10), 45.5; snout to tip of dorsal fin (11), 109.0; snout to center of umbilicus (12), 118.5; snout to anus (14), 173.5; projection of upper jaw (15), 1.0; girth at axilla (21), 119.5; maximum girth (22), 127.5; girth at anus (23), 86.5; eye height (24), 0.8; eye length (25), 3.0; blowhole length (27), 1.6; blowhole width (28), 4.4; anterior flipper length (29), 48.0; posterior flipper length (30), 34.5; maximum flipper width (31), 13.0; dorsal fin height (32), 20.5; dorsal fin base (33), 42.0; width of flukes (34), 59.0; depth of flukes (35), 22.0; depth of fluke notch (36), 4.0. The skeleton will be deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

This is apparently the first record of this species for Texas or the Gulf of Mexico. The addition of the Gulf of Mexico to the known range

of *Peponocephala electra* further indicates that this species is distributed continuously in the tropical and warm temperate regions of the world, as was suggested by Leatherwood and Reeves (1983) and Perryman et al. (in press). The recovery of a second Gulf of Mexico specimen of *P. electra* (moderately decomposed 246-cm male) on 14 June 1991 from Cameron Parish, Louisiana by TMMSN reinforces this supposition.

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