Peponocephala electra (Gray, 1846)

DELPH Pep 1 | MEW

FAO Names: En - Melon-headed whale**; Fr -** Péponocéphale**; Sp-** Calderón pequeño.

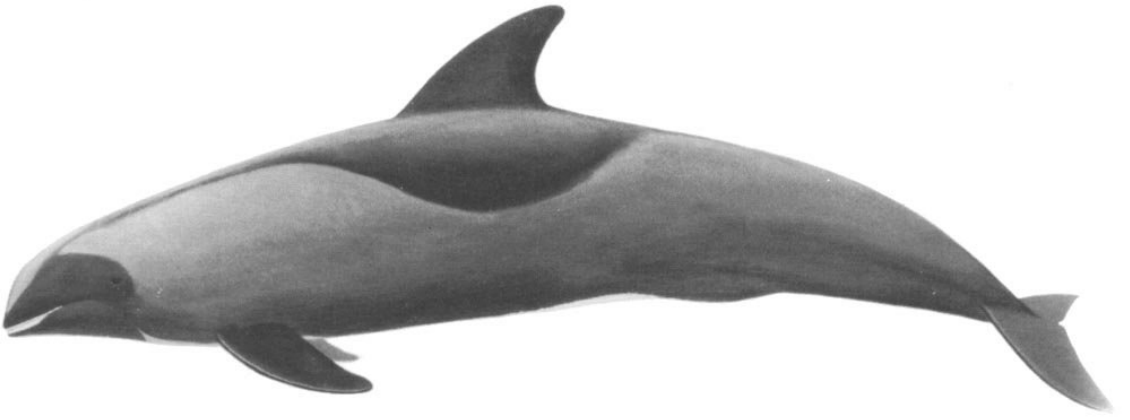
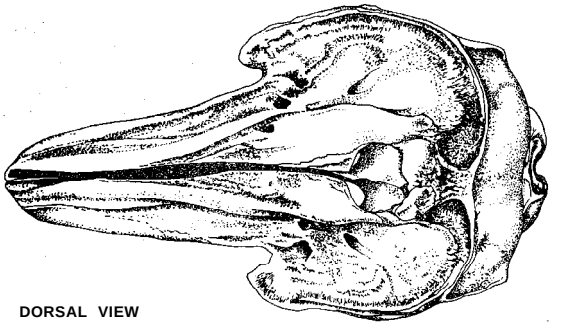


Fig. 289 ***Peponocephala electra***

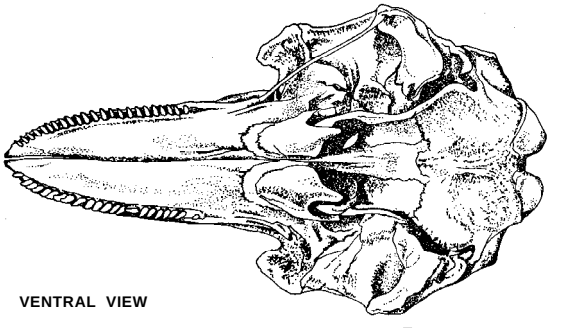
Distinctive Characteristics: At sea, melon-headed whales are often difficult to distinguish from pygmy killer whales. Major differences are that the melon-headed whale has pointed flippers and larger numbers of smaller teeth (pygmy killer whales have rounded flippers and only 8 to 13 pairs of more robust teeth). Also, melon-headed whales tend to have a more triangular head shape (when viewed from above or below), and females and young have a beak, albeit very short and poorly defined.

The body is generally charcoal grey to black, with white lips and a white urogenital patch. The black triangular "mask" on the face of melon-headed whales distinguishes them from the more uniformly coloured pygmy killer whales. Melon-headed whales also have a cape that dips much lower below the dorsal fin than that of pygmy killer whales, although its margin is often faint. There is a light stripe from the blowhole to the snout tip, which widens anteriorly.

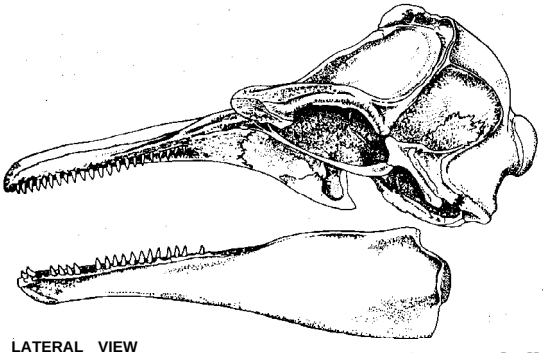
Melon-headed whales have 20 to 25 small slender teeth in each tooth row.



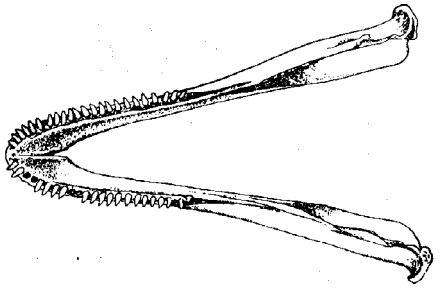
DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW



DORSAL VIEW OF MANDIBLE

Fig. 290 Skull

Can be confused with: Melon-headed whales are difficult to distinguish from pygmy killer whales (p. 128) at sea. Head shape, flipper shape, and the sweep of the cape can be useful in identification. False killer whales (p. 126) can also be confused with this species at a distance.

Size: Melon-headed whales reach a maximum of about 2.75 m. Maximum known weight is about 275 kg. Length at birth is thought to be about 1 m or less.

Geographical Distribution: The range of the melon-headed whale coincides almost exactly with that of the pygmy killer whale in tropical and subtropical oceanic waters between 40ºN and 35ºS

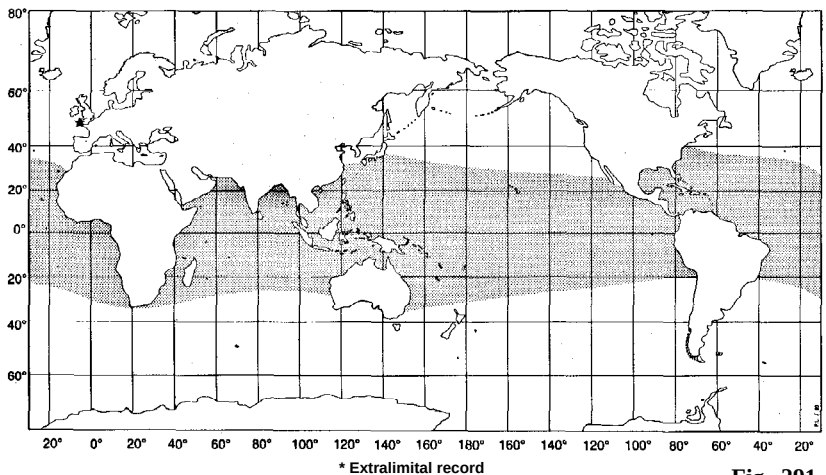


Fig. 291

Biology and Behavlour: Melon-headed whales are highly social, and are known to occur usually in pods of 100 to 500 (with a known maximum of 2 000 individuals). They are often seen swimming with other species, especially Fraser's dolphins, in the eastern tropical Pacific, Philippines, and Gulf of Mexico. Melon-headed whales often move at high speed, porpoising out of the water regularly, and are eager bowriders, often displacing other species from the bow wave.

There is some evidence to indicate a calving peak in July and August, but this is inconclusive.

Melon-headed whales are known to feed on squid and small fish.

Exploitation: A few melon-headed whales are known to be taken in purse seine and driftnet fisheries, and some are killed in drive fisheries in Japan, and in other directed fisheries in tropical regions of the world. Several individuals of this species have been captured for display in oceanaria.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

Sotalia fluviatilis (Gervais, 1853)

DELPH Sot 1 **TUC**

FAO Names: En - Tucuxi; **Fr** - Sotalia; **Sp** - Bufeo negro.
(Note - there are currently no agreed-upon common names for coastal ***Sotalia.*** The name tucuxi is used by locals only for the riverine animals. Brazilian fishermen call the marine animals boto or golfinho.)

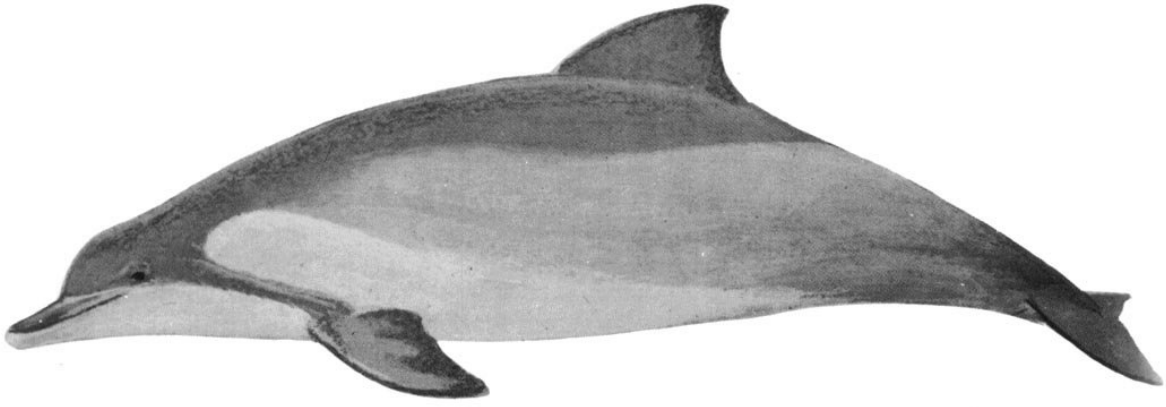


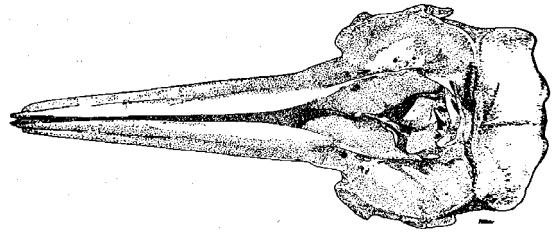
Fig. 292 *Sotalia fluviatilis*

Distinctive Characteristics: This small dolphin resembles the bottlenose dolphin (p. 154) in body shape: it is rather chunky. The snout is longer and narrower, the flippers are broader, and the dorsal fin is shorter and more triangular than in the bottlenose dolphin.

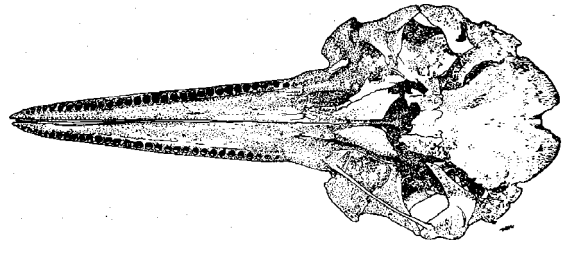
Dorsally, dolphins of the genus ***Sotalia*** are dark bluish or brownish grey, fading to light grey or white on the belly. Much of the light ventral area may be pinkish. There is a broad, somewhat indistinct stripe from the eye to the flipper and often light tones on the sides above the flippers.

The mouth contains 26 to 35 teeth in each row.

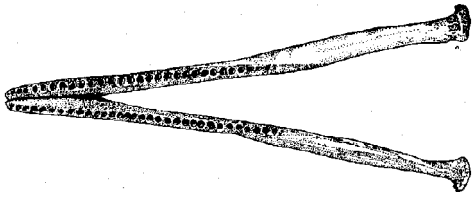
There are 2 forms of ***Sotalia,*** one found in rivers and lakes, and another in marine waters. Most of the information available on the species' biology comes from studies of the riverine form, and may not apply to those along the coast.



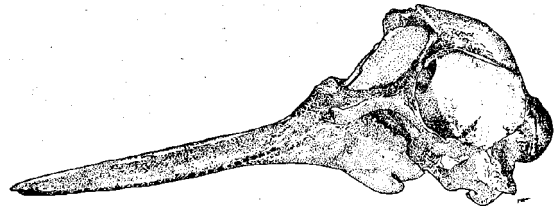
DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



DORSAL VIEW OF MANDIBLE



LATERAL VIEW

Fig. 293 Skull

Can be confused with: In the rivers, it is often difficult to distinguish Tucuxi from Boto (p. 198) at a distance. Up close, however, differences in dorsal-fin shape, head shape, and behaviour are the best clues to distinguishing them. Bottlenose dolphins could be mistaken for ***Sotalia*** along the coast, but they are much larger, with taller dorsal fins. Franciscana (p. 202) might also be difficult to distinguish from ***Sotalia*** in coastal waters. The franciscana has a larger body, much longer snout, and squarish (rather than pointed) flippers.

Size: Adult dolphins of the genus ***Sotalia*** are up to 2.1 m (coastal) and 1.6 m (riverine) in length. They reach weights of up to at least 40 kg. Size at birth is between 0.7 and 0.8 m.

Geographical Distribution: This dolphin is found mostly nearshore and in estuaries along the Atlantic coast, from Panama (perhaps Honduras) to southern Brazil. There are separate marine and freshwater populations. The latter are found in the Amazon and Orinoco drainage basins, as far inland as southern Peru, eastern Ecuador, and southeastern Colombia.

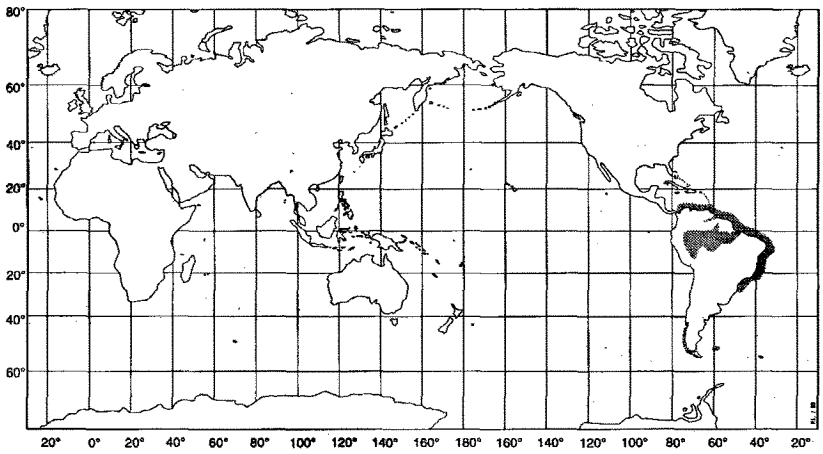


Fig. 294

Biology and Behaviour: Dolphins of the genus ***Sotalia*** live mostly in groups of 4 or fewer, although they are found in groups of up to 20 (in freshwater) or 50 (in marine waters). They are generally shy and difficult to approach. During the flood season, riverine animals may move into smaller tributaries, but apparently do not move into the inundated forest to feed (as boto do), staying mostly in the main river channels.

In Brazil, calving in the riverine form apparently occurs primarily during the low water period, October to November. Little else is known of the species' reproduction.

A wide variety of fish, mostly small schooling species, are eaten by riverine tucuxi. Those along the coast consume pelagic and demersal fish and cephalopods.

Exploitation: Coastal and riverine ***Sotalia*** are taken in gillnets, seines, and shrimp traps. In the Amazon, there may be some direct captures, and there is at least one record of harpooning a coastal animal. The coastal form is sometimes used for human consumption and as shark bait. Damming of the Amazon River potentially can cause isolation of segments of the population and reduce food supplies. Destruction and degradation of mangroves and exposure to polluted waters are other potential problems for this species.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.