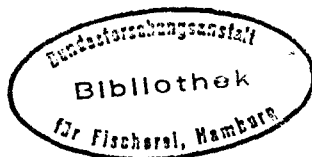


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DIETS OF SPERM WHALES STRANDED IN SCOTLAND

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ABSTRACT

In December 1994, 11 male sperm whales beached alive on the island of Sanday in Orkney (N Scotland). All the animals died shortly afterwards. Another male sperm whale stranded near Inverness (E Scotland) in March 1995.

Samples of stomach contents were obtained from 4 of the Orkney strandings and the Inverness animal. Blubber samples and teeth were removed for analysis of contaminants levels and ageing. All the whales were 20-25 years old.

Food remains from the stomachs consisted entirely of cephalopod beaks. No cephalopod flesh or fish remains (apart from a skate egg capsule in the stomach of the Inverness animal) were found, suggesting that most of the whales had not been feeding prior to stranding. The oceanic squid *Gonatus* sp. was the main species eaten but other squids (*Teuthowenia megalops*, *Histioteuthis* sp.) and a species of octopus, *Alloposus mollis*, were also found.

Sperm whales are rare in the North Sea and sightings or strandings of more than one animal are exceptional. These whales, along with others which were stranded in Belgium, Germany and Holland during the same period, may all have been members of a single group, since young male sperm whales are known to stay and travel together. Possible explanations for the strandings are discussed.