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A Review of Cetaceans from the Red Sea

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Methods. Positions on the map include: sightings made by authors. Addink and Smeenk provided sightings made during trans-Red Sea cruises in 1984, 1985, 1993, 2000, 2001. Notarbartolo di Sciarra provided sightings from Sudan (1988), Eritrea (1993), Sudan (1996), and Egypt (2006). Rudolph provided sightings made in Egypt from 2001 to 2007. Only sightings of animals identified at least to genus level are provided. Literature data were derived from Debelius (1999) and Gladstone and Fisher (2000).

Cetaceans movements into the Red Sea from adjacent basins. While the regular species are found throughout the basin, most of the rarer species were recorded from the southern half of the Red Sea, suggesting that such occurrences may have involved visitors from the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian Ocean. No evidence exists to date of Mediterranean cetaceans visiting the Red Sea, while there are rare records of *S. chinensis* entering the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal.

Introduction. Cetaceans from the Red Sea still remain among the world's least known, and some uncertainty surrounds even the species composition in the region. Of the few existing reviews of cetacean presence and distribution in the Red Sea, the most recent and comprehensive is that provided by Baldwin in 2003. This paper summarises the existing knowledge by combining literature data with original sightings. Personal observations combined with a review of the literature suggest that **eight** cetacean species occur regularly in the Red Sea (Tab. 1). **Eight** other species also occur in the region, but are apparently rare (Tab. 2). The presence in the Red Sea of common minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) is mentioned in the literature, but we consider these records unlikely.

Table 1. Observations of regular species

<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>	◻	Reported from Farasan Islands (Gladstone and Fisher 2000)
<i>Delphinus capensis</i> , <i>Delphinus</i> sp.	◻	Deep waters, found mostly in S. Red Sea
<i>Grampus griseus</i>	◻	Deep waters, throughout region
<i>Sousa chinensis</i>	◻	Coastal shallow waters, throughout
<i>Stenella attenuata</i>	◻	Deep waters, throughout
<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	◻	Deep waters and reefs, throughout
<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	◻	Coastal waters, found mostly in the north
<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	◻	Coastal waters, throughout
<i>Tursiops</i> sp.	◻	Symbol was used when dolphins could not be identified to species



Table 2. Presence of rare species

<i>Feresa</i> or <i>Peponocephala</i>	◻	Observed in deep waters
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	◻	Young observed and photographed in Gulf of Aqaba, near Dahab (Debelius 1999)
<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i> , <i>Globicephala</i> sp.	◻	Observed in deep waters
<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	-	Considered rare but present
<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>	◻	Observed in deep waters
<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	◻	Observed in deep waters
<i>Orcinus orca</i>	-	Considered rare but present
<i>Steno bredanensis</i>	-	Considered present

Conservation concerns. Although Red Sea cetaceans may be considered today among the world's least impacted by man, mostly due to the low human densities along the region's desert coasts, likely increases in activities in the near future (e.g., tourist coastal development, shipping) suggest the need for a greater effort at collecting knowledge of the local cetacean populations, their ecological characteristics, potential threats and conservation status.

References

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