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Eastern Caribbean

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Cuvier's beaked whale is the most cosmopolitan of the beaked whales and is found in all oceans except in the high polar waters. This species is known from over 1600 strandings. In the Caribbean strandings are rare, and we present a first record from Antigua and Barbuda.

Antigua and Barbuda is a twin-island country lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. It consists of two major inhabited islands, Antigua and Barbuda, and a number of smaller islands.

Beaked whales (Family Ziphiidae) are known to occur in the Caribbean (Smithsonian Inst. database, accessed 30/4/2015), but records are scarce. Among the family, Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) is the most commonly stranded ziphiid worldwide (Allen et. al. 2012, Bachara and Norman 2013). Here we present the first stranding record of this species on Barbuda Island, in the eastern Caribbean Sea. On Wednesday 9/4/2014, a live-stranding of a whale occurred between Palmetto and River Beach (approx. 17.591613, -61.823052) (**Fig.1**). Several attempts were made by local residents to push the whale back into the sea, but it returned to the beach each time. Pictures of the stranding (**Fig.2**) were uploaded to social networks and then one of the authors (**MWG**) coordinated efforts with local fisheries officers to document the case. The carcass was lying in the surf zone and was examined by **MWG** on Friday 11/4/2014 (**Fig.3**). Total length was estimated at about 500-600 cm. At the time of examination, the carcass was in condition code 3 (according to criteria in Geraci and Lounsbury 2005). The whale was identified by one of us (**WB**) as a sub-adult or adult female Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) based on the characteristic features and profile of the animal's head, including a smoothly-sloping forehead, stubby, poorly-defined beak, and a mouth-line that was curved along most of its length with an upturn at the rear and absence of erupted teeth in the lower jaw (Heyning 1989).

During examination, an unidentified large shark, whose length was estimated at 300-400 cm, was seen in the area and had already taken pieces of flesh from the whale. No detailed necropsy was made and no samples were collected because of logistical constraints, so the causes of stranding could not be determined.

This is the first stranding record of the species in Antigua and Barbuda (Allen et. al. 2012, Bachara and Norman 2013) and highlights the importance of future efforts to organize stranding response in this country as it exists in the rest of the Caribbean (IWC 2011, A. Mignucci pers. comm.).

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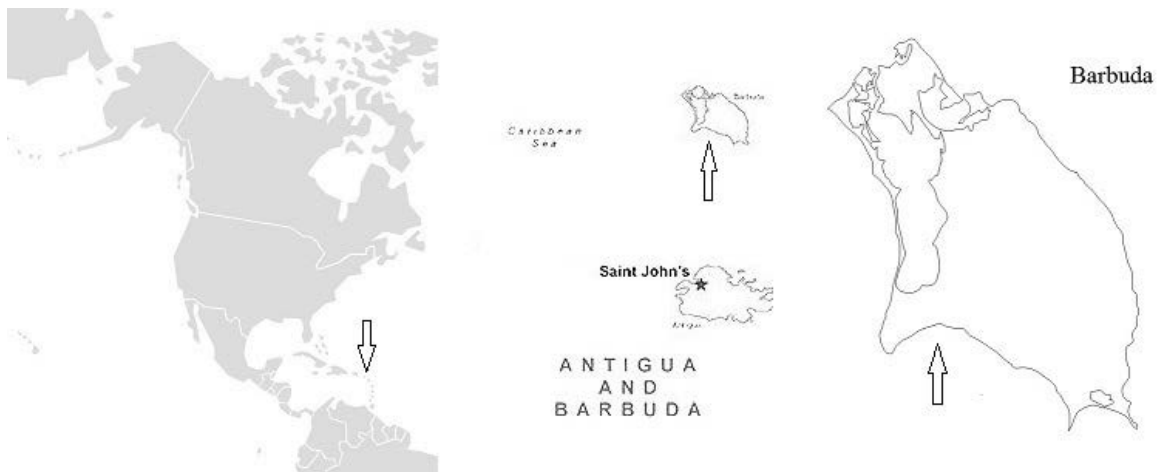


Fig. 1. The stranding site



Fig. 2. Photo: Martha Watkins Gilkes



Fig. 3 Photo: Martha Watkins Gilkes