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First stranding record of a Cuviers beaked whale in Mozambique- a short note

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Cuvier's beaked whales may have the most extensive range of any beaked whale species. They are widely distributed in offshore waters of all oceans, from the tropics to the polar regions in both hemispheres. This species is known from some strandings in Africa and we present a first record from Mozambique.

Mozambique is a country in Southeast Africa and boasts a number of islands and archipelagos. One of them, the Primeiras and Segundas Archipelago is a chain of 10 sparsely inhabited barrier islands and two coral reef complexes situated in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Mozambique.

On 2 April 2013 one of us (JBD) received a phone call from the head community ranger about a beached whale, stranded on Mafamede Island (Latitude: -16°21'8" Longitude: 40°2'7") (Fig.1), the northern-most island of the Segundas archipelago off of Angoche. It was in an advanced state of decomposition (Figs. 2-3). The caudal 1/3 of the body presented with lacerations and injuries, including absence of the tail flukes, consistent with a suspected boat collision.

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 (Figure 2) (Heyning, 1989), the stranded whale was identified by one of us (WB) as a Cuvier's beaked whale *Ziphius cavirostris*. The total length, measured as 540-560cm (slashed tail) and along with a lack of protruding teeth, aided in the determination of its age class and sex as an adult female.

Cuvier's beaked whales have a cosmopolitan distribution and can be found in most oceans and seas worldwide. Most of the distribution information is based on stranding records (Ross et.al. 1989, Heyning, 1989). In Africa they have been reported in Algeria, Ghana (by-caught), Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Mauritania, Namibia, Senegal, Syria, with majority in South Africa (Bachara and Norman 2013).

Cetacean strandings are rare in Mozambique (A. Gullan pers.comm.). In the beaked whales family, there are only two known records- two males True's beaked whales (A. Gullan and K. Van Der Merwe pers.comm.) from Mozambique Mainland. There are only five strandings of a Cuvier's beaked whale in East Africa- one in Kenya (Bachara and Norman 2013), three from Eastern Cape, South Africa and one from Natal, South Africa (Ross et.al. 1989). Additionally, one was harpooned off Natal and one was found drifted off Natal (Ross et.al. 1989).

This paper provides a first record of a Cuvier's beaked whale stranding in Mozambique, that can now be added to a list ziphiidae strandings in East Africa.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2. Female's head.



Figure 3. Whole body showing lack of tail flukes