

An annotated, amended and revised list of 18th century sperm whale stranding records from the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat coasts: A ‘retro-cetological’ approach using searchable digitised newspapers

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Abstract: Searchable digitised newspapers, consulted to detect information on 18th century sperm whale strandings, revealed several hitherto overlooked records for the British (16), Dutch (1), Danish (1) and Norwegian (1) sections of the North Sea coastline as well as further details on already documented records and verified the species assignment of earlier only insufficiently documented records. A revised list of records is provided.

Keywords: sperm whale strandings, *Physeter macrocephalus*, 18th century, North Sea area, digitised newspapers.

Introduction

Sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) are known to have stranded along the North Sea coasts back in time till at least the 13th century and have been the subject of several retrospective review papers, most recently the comprehensive posthumous treatise by Chris Smeenk, edited and amended by Peter G.H. Evans (Smeenk & Evans 2018), who provided and validated numerous reports on 16th, 17th and 18th century stranding records from a whole array of sources, but mainly based on scientific treatises and reviews published considerably later than the actual events.

During the 18th century and along with a growing urban population local and regional newspapers increased in numbers significantly all around the North Sea. Many record

details published by Smeenk and Evans (2018) hence indirectly originate from newspaper reports and broadsides available to the various reviewers through time, but due to the ephemeral nature of newspapers in general and in particular their restrains in circulation within natural history circles an unknown number of records with certainty has been overlooked.

Although proven to be an important source for the rediscovery of overlooked cetacean records, hitherto, systematically searching the historic newspaper archives was considered ‘a lifetime or more job’, and therefore, too time consuming to conduct. However, with searchable digitised newspapers becoming more and more available, an entirely new branch to be named ‘retro-cetology’ has emerged making this very search faster and feasible.

For a good deal of sperm whale records the exact date, sometimes even the precise year and for others the stranding locality could

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not be established from the works available to Smeenk and Evans (2018), mainly due to the lack of contemporaneous sources. Here, I therefore provide a review of 18th century sperm whale records based on additional information from newspaper reports for the purpose of verifying doubtful records, delivering useful additional information on known records and, most importantly, recovering overlooked records.

Material and methods

Sperm whales, also named *spermaceti whales* or *large grampus whales*, are easy to identify from the newspaper record, ideally by their reported length and the presence of two rows of ivory teeth, one in either side of the lower jaw with corresponding sockets in the upper jaw. Additional identification criteria applied were the large size of the head in combination with the total length and subsequent advertisements of spermaceti oil referring to the same event.

The 18th century was selected due to the larger number of records already known to science, second only to the 20th century (Smeenk & Evans 2018) and the availability of many local and regional newspapers throughout the century from searchable digitised platforms.

The area covered follows the delineation given by Smeenk and Evans (2018): the French Channel coast north of Cape Gris Nez, the North Sea coasts of the United Kingdom (from Duncansby Head, Scotland to the north and to the town of Dover, England to the south), Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark and the Skagerrak and Kattegat coasts of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. For the English and Scottish North Sea coasts a systematic search was conducted in the *British Newspaper Archive*, <https://www.british-newspaperarchive.co.uk/> whilst the Dutch records were searched for in *Delpher Kranten* <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten>. Danish

and Norwegian records were retrieved from the platform *Mediestream* <http://www2.statsbiblioteket.dk/mediestream/avis>. Unfortunately for the time being, similar digital platforms could not be consulted for a search of additional Belgian, French, German, Norwegian and Swedish records. The conducted search included both contemporaneous vernacular names in English (spermaceti whale, cachelot, and 'large grampus whale' in combination with a reported length exceeding 45 feet), Dutch (cagelot, cagilot, cazilot, potvis) and Danish/Norwegian (spemacethval, potfisk, kaskelot) as well as scientific names (*Physeter macrocephalus*; *Physeter catodon*). Additions and improvements to the Smeenk and Evans 2018 review extracted from the digitised newspaper record are highlighted in table 1.

Results

For the British North Sea coasts "new" records were retrieved for the years 1712, 1721, 1730 (2), 1737, 1753 (2), 1762, 1766 (2), 1767, 1768 (2), 1775, 1778 and 1781, which constitutes almost a doubling of British records (table 1). The sources for of all these records are provided in appendix 1.

For the earliest stranding record reported by Wallis (1769) to have taken place "forty five years ago" (ca. 1725 in Smeenk & Evans 2018) no additional information could be extracted from the newspaper record, while for the later record "twenty years ago" (ca. 1749) an exact year and month of stranding was revealed. A record listed for the year 1794 by Smeenk and Evans (2018) based on an undetected and repeated misprint in Gray (1850, 1866) was corrected to December 1763 (Anonymus 1764, Barthelmess & Svanberg 2013; figure 1). Possibly Woods (1829) and after him by van Beneden and Gervais (1880) erroneously place this Kentish record in the year 1769. Since no record could be verified from the coast of Kent for this particular year from

Table 1. Revised list of 18th century North Sea sperm whale records. Smeenk and Evans (2018) refer to all references given in their review for the individual record. Additions to the Smeenk & Evans (2018) list are marked green, corrections are dark green. ‘ = feet; U = Length unknown.

British records

Year	Date	Locality and source(s)	Length(s)	Additions
1701	12 Jul	Cramond Island, Firth of Forth, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018)	52’	None
1703	23 Feb	Monifieth, Angus, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018)	57’	None
1712	17 Sep	The Hope Point, Thames Estuary, Kent, England Newcastle Courant, 17 September 1712 Appendix 1	50’	New Record
1721	Nov	Busby, Yorkshire, England Caledonian Mercury, 27 November 1721 Appendix 1	58½’	New Record
ca.1725	?	Cresswell, Northumberland, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None
1730	Jan	Inverness, Highlands, Scotland Caledonian Mercury, 3 February 1730 Appendix 1	U U U	New Record
1730	Jun	Crail, Fife, Scotland Caledonian Mercury, 29 June 1730 Appendix 1	U U U	New Record
1737	Dec	Bradwell /u Sea , Essex, England Stamford Mercury, 8 December 1737 Appendix 1	53’	New Record
1738	Jan	Hauxley, Northumberland, England Smeenk & Evans (2018): ca. 1749 Newcastle Courant, 7 January 1738 Appendix 1	54’	Exact year and month added
1740	Nov	Cullross, Firth of Forth, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018) Ipswich Journal, 20 December 1740 Appendix 1	U	Verified
1740	Dec	Cramond, Firth of Forth, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018) Derby Mercury, 8 December 1740	ca. 55’ (50-60’)	None
1753	13 Jan	Cokenzie (Port Seton), East Lothian, Scotland The Scots Magazine, January 1753: 48 Caledonian Mercury, 12 February 1753 Appendix 1	57’	New Record
1753	Feb	Melviston near Findhorn, Moray, Scotland Caledonian Mercury, 12 February 1753	55’ 55’ 55’	Reported Lengths Added
1757	13 Jan	Belhelvie, Aberdeen, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018) Oxford Journal, Saturday 5 February 1757 The Scots Magazine, 7 February 1757 Appendix 1	62’	Species verified Reported length added
1758	?	Earlsferry, Fife, Scotland Smeenk & Evans (2018)	52’	None

1762	30 Jan	Hope Point, Thames Estuary, Kent, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None
1762	Jan/Feb	King's Lynn, Lincolnshire, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U U	None
1762	2-4 Feb	Broadstairs, Essex, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	60' 62'	None
1762	2-4 Feb	Birchington, Essex, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	54' 58'	None
1762	26 Mar	Wolferton Creek, Lincolnshire, England The Ipswich Journal, 3 April 1762 Appendix 1	60'	New Record
1763	15 Dec	Whitestable Bay, Kent, England The Ipswich Journal, 24 December 1763 Anonymus (1764) Smeenk & Evans (2018) figure 1 Appendix 1	54'	Year corrected, not 1794
1766	18 Nov	Seaton Snook = Mouth of River Tee, Durham, England Smeenk & Evans (2018)	48'	Date corrected
1766	29 Nov	Folkstone, Essex, England Newcastle Chronicle, 29 November 1766 Appendix 1	U	New Record
1766	Dec	Banf, Highlands, Scotland Newcastle Courant, 20 December 1766 Appendix 1	58'	New Record
1767	8 Jan	Bridlington Bay, Yorkshire, England Newcastle Courant, 17 January 1767 Caledonian Mercury, 21 January 1767 Appendix 1	58'	New Record
1768	Jan	Lynn Deepes, Lincolnshire, England Newcastle Chronicle, 30 January 1768	59'	New Record
1768	March	Cramond Isl., Firth of Forth, Scotland Caledonian Mercury, 16 March 1768	60'	New Record
1769	22 Dec	Cramond Isl., Firth of Forth, Scotland Robertson (1770) Smeenk & Evans (2018)	54'	None
1775	Dec	Bridlington Bay, Yorkshire, England Newcastle Courant, 9 December 1775	54'	New Record
1778	Sep	Boston Deepes, Lincolnshire, England Stamford Mercury, 1 October 1778	54'	New Record
1781	Jun	Easington, Durham, England Newcastle Chronicle, 16 June 1781	54'	New Record
1795	17 Jul	Redcar, Yorkshire, England Stamford Mercury, 24 July 1795 Howes (2010)	50'	Exact date

French, Belgian and Dutch records

Year	Date	Locality and source(s)	Length(s)	Additions
1761	5 Mar	Banc des Laines, Wissant, France Smeenk & Evans (2018)	48'	None
1761	Dec	Texel, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	53½'	None
1762	18-21 Jan	Bredene, Blankenberge, Belgium Smeenk & Evans (2018)	62' 64'	None
1762	Jan	Holland coast, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U U U U U U	None
1762	20 Feb	Zandvoort, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	55½'	None
1763	30 Jun	De Hors, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	57½'	None
1764	15 Feb	Egmond, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	60'	None
1767	Nov	Sas van Gent, the Netherlands Leeds Intelligencer, 24 November 1767 De Smet (1997) Appendix 1	60'	New record
1781	17 May	Zandvoort, the Netherlands Smeenk & Evans (2018)	64'	None

German records

Year	Date	Locality and source(s)	Length(s)	Additions
1720	31 Dec	Wischhafen, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	60 to 70'	None
1723	2/3 Dec	Schahörn, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	60 to 80' 18 individuals	None
1738	2/24 Jan	Süderhöft, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	48' U U	None
1751	Feb/Mar	Horumersiel, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None
1751	14 Mar	Minsener Oldenoog, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	54'3"	None
1759/60	Dec/Jan	Eiderstedt, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	58'	None
1762	Jan	Kachelotplatte, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None
1762	22 Jan	Borkum, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	ca. 15 m	None
1762	Jan/Feb	Scharhörn, Germany Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None

Danish, Norwegian and Swedish records

Year	Date	Locality and source(s)	Length(s)	Additions
1718	Nov	Stora Överön, Sweden Bernström (1949)	44'	None
1718?		Læsø, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	None
1749	Nov	Hunnebostrand, Sweden Smeenk & Evans (2018)	Ca. 70'	Non
1757	26 Jan	Vestervig, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	52'	None
1757	10 Feb	Sønderho, Fanø, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	64' 60' 62'	None
1758	23 Jan	Norby, Samsø, Denmark Københavnske Danske Post-Tidender, 3 March 1758 Appendix 1	58'	New record
1761	Dec	Bovbjerg, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	Month deduced from Houuttuyn (1762)
1765	29 Jan	Bunken Strand, Denmark Smeenk and Evans (2018)	48' 60'	None
1767	Feb/Mar	Skagerrak coast of Thisted Customs District, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	54'	Same length as Vestervig (1757)
1767	May	Skallingen, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	U	year corrected, not 1765
1770	1 Dec	Hjarnø, Denmark Smeenk & Evans (2018)	52'	None
1792	31 Dec	Jarlsberg, Norway Fabers Fyenske Avertissements-Tidende eller de til Forsendelse med Posten Kongelig allene privilegerede Fyens Stifts almindelige Adresse- Contours Efterretninger, 31 December 1792 Appendix 1	54½'	New Record

the digitised newspaper record, I have deleted it from this list (table 1).

For the year 1762 and the months January and February Smeenk and Evans (2018) accepted a stranding of two individuals from the district of Holland on the Lincolnshire coast, based on van Deinse's (1931) interpretation of Gray's (1866) statement "coast of Holland" not being Holland, the Netherlands, but the district of Holland, UK. However, contemporaneous newspapers do not report any stranding from 'Holland district', Lincolnshire. The district of Holland, Lincolnshire, is situated just adjacent to King's Lynn, Norfolk, and therefore most likely a double count seems to be the case. Therefore,

these records also have been deleted.

Only three of the Dutch records listed by Smeenk and Evans (2018) were also found in digitised Dutch newspapers, therefore qualitatively adding rather little to the existing knowledge. However, for the township of Sas van Gent, Province of Zeeland, and so far only supported by British sources, a stranding of a 60 ft whale was reported for November 1767 (Leeds Intelligencer - Tuesday 24 November 1767), i.e. amidst the North Sea stranding season established for the species. Since this locality coincides with subsequent finds of sperm whale bones discovered in 1948 (De Smet 1997), a single new Dutch record could be added.

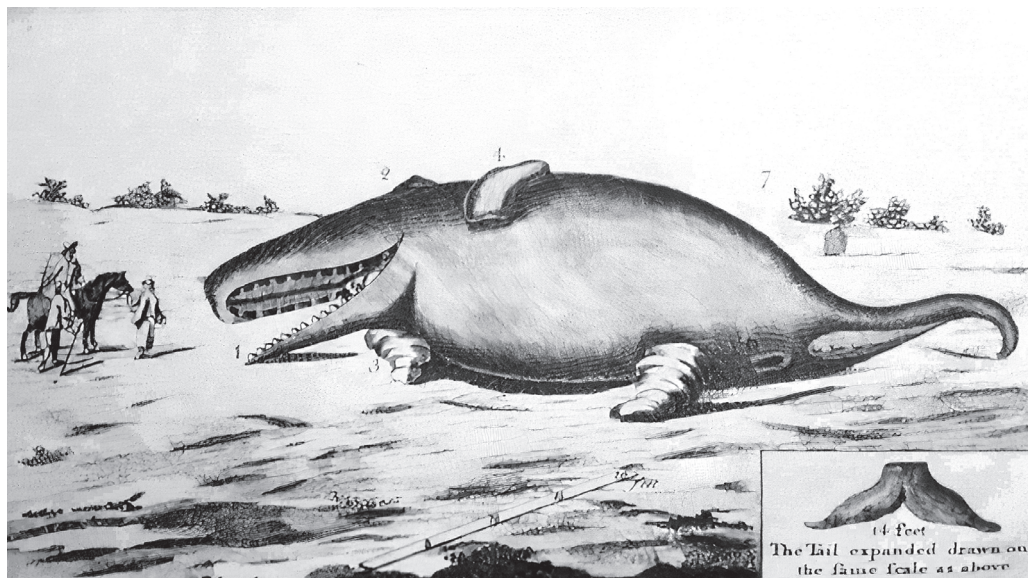


Figure 1. Sperm whale stranding near Whitstable, Kent, December 1763.

Except for a single record, all Danish sperm whale strandings already have been retrieved from Danish newspapers and provided by the author for the Smeenk and Evans review. The additional record concerns a stranding of a 58 ft individual on the northern tip of the island of Samsø in the Kattegat on 23 January 1758. For the year 1761 a well-known stranding at Bovbjerg based on an engraved tooth in the Ringkøbing Museum, Ringkøbing, Denmark was assigned to the month of December matching a sperm whale stranding on the coast of Jutland reported by Houttuyn (1762). The correct year for the sperm whale stranding occurring at Skallingen in the month of May was not 1765 as reported by the author for the Smeenk and Evans (2018) review, but 1767 (see table 1). A Norwegian stranding occurred at Jarlsberg in the Inner Oslo Fjord in December 1792, based on a Danish newspaper (Fabers Fyenske Avertissements-Tidende eller de til Forsendelse med Posten Kongelige allene privilegerede Fyens Stifts almindelige Adresse-Contoirs Efterretninger of 31st December 1792).

The newspaper record revealed several hitherto unknown multiple stranding events for

the greater North Sea area. Two incidents took place in 1730 on the Scottish seaboard in late January and mid-June of that year, respectively (table 1). For the year 1738 the recovered British and the already known German records may be connected since all refer to the month of January. For the year 1781 there may have been a possible connection between the Dutch (17 May) and the British (23 June) record.

Until 2016 the sperm whale strandings between December 1761 and March 1762 were considered the largest reported event with 21 individuals as listed by Smeenk and Evans (2018). The revised record list also amounts to 21. However, the recount included the deletion of two from the Lincolnshire coast and the addition of two new events (Bovbjerg, DK, December 1761; Lynn, UK, 26 March 1762). A French stranding reported for January 1762 (Derby Mercury, 5 February 1762) could not be further verified for the 1761/62 stranding season, and may refer to the March 1761 stranding near Calais, NW-France, i.e. the preceding stranding season (Fischer 1872).

Discussion and concluding remarks

The use of digitised searchable newspapers to reveal insights to whale occurrences has been proven a useful tool and therefore prompts a wider application to other geographical areas and other cetacean species. Digitising historical newspapers is an ongoing process and more records are expected to emerge from newspapers yet to be digitised. These newspaper reports also potentially provide key data for further studies into unpublished archival data. Retro-cetology therefore combines classical zoological skills such as knowledge of nomenclature and its history through time with historical disciplines such a profound knowledge of contemporaneous orthography (and search terms) within the various languages.

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Samenvatting

Een aanvullende en herziene lijst van 18-eeuwse potvisstrandingen langs de kusten van de Noordzee, het Skagerrak en het Kattegat: een 'retro-cetologische' benadering met gebruik van doorzoekbare, gedigitaliseerde krantenberichten

Doorzoekbare, gedigitaliseerde kranten, geraadpleegd om informatie op te sporen over 18e-eeuwse strandingen van potvissen, onthulden verschillende tot nu toe over het hoofd geziene meldingen voor de Britse (16), Nederlandse (1), Deense (1) en Noorse (1)

delen van de Noordzeekust. In deze bijdrage wordt een herziene lijst met meldingen verstrekt. Ook worden nadere details verstrekt over reeds gedocumenteerde meldingen en een geverifieerde soorttoewijzing van eerdere, onvoldoende gedocumenteerde meldingen. Het digitaliseren van historische kranten is een continu proces en er wordt verwacht dat er meer documenten zullen verschijnen uit nog te digitaliseren kranten. 'Retro-cetologie' combineert daarom klassieke zoölogische vaardigheden met historische disciplines.

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Appendix 1

Additional sperm whale strandings

Sources: British Newspaper Archive and Mediestream.dk

1712

Newcastle Courant - Wednesday 17 September 1712

Some Days since, a Grampus, or young Whale, of 50 Foot in length, run upon the Sands, above the Hope, and by much beating, got off again to Sea, before the Tyde had left him; but the next Tyde, the Wind blowing hard at South, he was driven again upon the Sands, in the same Place, and notwithstanding his Struggling could not get off, whereupon the Country People came down and killed him. He was brought up in a barge the last Saturday, through Bridge, to the Falcon in Southwark, over against Black Fryers, whither great concourse of People flocked to see him.

Dublin Intelligence - Saturday 20 September 1712

A Whale 47 Foot long was lately taken on the Coast of Essex and they are bringing it up to Deptford.

Comment: If the name 'grampus' commonly in use for (smaller) toothed whales implies the presence of teeth, the only possible toothed whale species of that length (either 47 or 50 feet; appr. 15 m) would be a sperm whale. Being named a 'young whale' in this conjunction may not weaken the species assignment and merely refer to the reported length of the whale compared to a full-grown individual, thence believed to attain lengths of 100 feet and beyond. No further record of this whale has so far been unveiled. The stranding locality according to newspapers is given Hope Point and Essex, a 'typical' sperm whale stranding locality and the date possibly 10 September, being slightly prior to the 'normal' stranding season. The species ID nevertheless remains tentative until harder evidence might appear.

1721

Caledonian Mercury - Monday 27 November 1721

They write from Busby in York-shire, That a large Fish was lately driven on Shoar in the Teex River; it was 19 Yards and a Half long, the Jaw-bones two Yards distant: The upper Jaw had Sockets to the Teeth of the lower Jaw, which had 23 on one Side, and 17 longer on the other. There hath been a great Quantity of Oil out of it: This Fish is supposed by some to have been a Bottle Nose, there being no Fins as belong to Whales. It was driven on Shoar in the Royalty of Cholmondeley Turner Esq; a Representative of the Burgh of Northallerton.

Comment: A total length of 19½ yards = 58½ feet = ca. 18 m reliably identifies this toothed whale as a sperm whale and the sockets only in the upper and the teeth in the lower jaw provide undisputable proof.

1730

Two multiple stranding events have occurred within the course of the year.

Case 1:

Caledonian Mercury - Tuesday 3 February 1730

We are told that two Whales are lately drove on Shore near Inverness

Caledonian Mercury - Monday 29 June 1730

We hear that a Dispute has arisen betwixt my Lord Admiral and Mr. Dunbar of Thunderton, and other Heritors in Murray-shire, who claim Admirrly [sic!] in their own Lands, touching the Property of the Whales some Time ago set on Shore in Murray-Firth, as noticed in this Paper; out of which there has been extracted ten Barrels of Sperma Cete.

Caledonian Mercury - Monday 6 July 1730

A Ship is arrived at Deptford with the Blubber of 3 Whales lately drove by Distress of Weather on the Highlands of Scotland, and left on the Banks, which the Company has bought off the Highlanders

Comment: The species assignment is indisputable due the sheer amount of spermaceti oil reported.

Case 2:

Caledonian Mercury - Monday 29 June 1730
Some Day last Week 3 Whales were cast ashore on the East-nook of Fife, near Crail.

Caledonian Mercury - Thursday 13 August 1730

That at the Town of KILRANIE in the County of Fife, upon the 14th Day of August current, betwixt the Hours of 9 and 12 in the Forenoon, there is to be exposed to publick Sale within the Tolbooth of Kilranie, by Mr. Thomas Fordyce Deputy Admiral on the Coast of Fife, a larg [sic!] Parcel of Blubber, or the Speck and Sperm of three Sperma Cete Whales lately come in on that Coast, consisting of about 146 Barrels of Speck or Blubber, and 23 Barrels of Sperma Cete Speck. The said Speck and Sperm is to be seen at the said Town of Kilranie, and the Conditions of Sale in the Hands of Thomas Nairn one of the Baillies of Anstruther, or in the Hands of the said Thomas Fordyce of Edinburgh

Comment: The species assignment is indisputable.

1737

Stamford Mercury - Thursday 8 December 1737

We hear that a few Days ago John and James Inward, &c. of Lambeth in Surrey, Fishermen catch'd a large Fish, commonly call'd a Cashalot, at a Place call'd the Sweet, near Bradwell in Essex, which was 53 Feet in Length, 14 Feet from the Eye to the Nose, in Bulk 12 Feet high, in the Opening the lower Jaw of the Mouth 8 Feet 4 Inches, 23 Ivory Teeth on each Side the Jaw, only two Fins, and the Tail in Breadth 14 Feet from Fork to Fork.

Comment: The species assignment is indisputable.

1738

Newcastle Courant - 7 January 1738

A few Days ago a Grampus (18 Yards in Length, and every other Way proportionable) was drove on Shore by the Tide at Hauxley in Northumberland.

Comment: A length of 18 yards or 54 feet and the site perfectly match the stranding event reported by Wallis (1769) except for the year which according to him took place "about twenty years ago" (given as ca. 1749 in Smeenk & Evans 2018). I consider it safe to assume 1738 as the correct year, since no other stranding record could be found in the newspaper archive for the particular locality.

1753

Two cases were revealed for this year:

Case 1:

The Scots Magazine - January 1753: page 48.
Published after 13 January and before 5 February 1753.

A Whale about 57 feet long, came ashore about a mile eastward of Cockenzie East Lothian, Jan. 13. The wahle-fishing company's servants were employed to cut her down, &c. More fishes of the same kind were seen in the frith (sic!); and about two weeks after, three came ashore near Maviston on the property of Alexander Brodie of Brodie, Esq; Lord Lyon, said to worth 1500 l Sterling.

Comment: The three whales from Maviston = Melviston, near Findhorn were sperm whales, so therefore also this one.

Case 2:

Caledonian Mercury - Monday 12 February 1753

We hear that last Week came ashore near Meviston, within two Miles from Findhorn, three Whales, or Spermacete Fish, about 55 Feet each; and that upon Application made to the Whale Fishing Company here, they have ordered some of their Servants to go North and cut them down for the Behoof of the Party concerned. ---- They are much of the same Size and the same Species with the Fish that came ashore lately near Port- Seton.

Comment: Port Seton = Cockenzie.

1757

Oxford Journal - Saturday 5 February 1757

We hear from Aberdeen, that on Thursday the 13th of January, a Spermaceti Whale was cast ashore on the sands of Belhelvie, about six miles from that Place. The Length of this Fish was 62 Feet, 45 Inches (sic!) in Circumference, and the Breadth of her Tale (sic!) 16 Feet. The Under Jaw was nine feet and a Half.

The Scotsmen February 1757 adds:

... and had a row of teeth on each side, four inches each in length, and thick at the root as a man's wrist. In the upper jaw there were sockets to receive these, but no teeth.

Comment: Confirms the species identity, so far insufficiently documented in Smeenk & Evans (2018).

1758

Danish record

Københavnske Danske Post-Tidender - 3 March 1758

Fra Samsøe berettes, at der ved Nordbye-Land er den 23. Jan. funden en liden Springhval, omtrent 29 Alen lang, 7 Alen breed og ligesaa dyb, som Indbyggerne i Nordbye er bleven bjerget, Hovedet var omtrent 9 Alen lang.

We hear from Samsøe that at Nordbye-Land on 23th January a little springhval, about 29 ells in length, 7 ells in breath and likewise in deapth was found and secured by people from Nordbye. The head was about 9 ells in length.

Comment: The size of the head is considered diagnostic for a sperm whale; the species assignment is further supported by the reported length and date of the stranding.

Omura, H. 1950. On the body weight of sperm and sei whales located in the adjacent waters of Japan. Reports of the Whale Research Institute 4: 1-13.

1762

The Ipswich Journal - Saturday 3 April 1762

LYNN, March 31. Last Friday was found in the

River near Wolverton, about seven Miles from Lynn, a Spermaceti Whale, measuring from Head to Tail about sixty Feet, and about fifteen Feet high. Numbers of Gentry and others all round the Country have been to see it.

Comment: The species assignment is indisputable. Last Friday refers to 26 March 1762. The locality Wolverton River or Wolverton Creek is a narrow tidal channel. No stranding hitherto has been reported for the month of March.

1763

The Ipswich Journal - Saturday 24 December 1763

Canterburry, Dec. 17. We hear that on Thursday last a whale, about 56 feet long, and alive, was drove ashore at Sea-Salter near Whitstable. Abundance of people out of curiosity go to see it, and it is said to be still alive.

Comment: Thursday last (17 December) = 15 December. The same event was dealt with in the Gentlemen's Magazine of February 1764, though erroneously dating it to December 1764. Gray (1850, 1866) introduced another error by stating the event to have occurred in 1794.

1766

There are two cases for this year:

Newcastle Chronicle - Saturday 29 November 1766

We hear the whale brought on shore near Folkstone by a Margate cutter, proves a spermaceti one, and being found at sea without the liberties of the Cinque-ports, is the property of the Admiralty of Great Britain.

Comments: This record concerns a southernmost "North Sea record" at the border of the greater North Sea area as defined by Smeenk & Evans (2018).

Newcastle Courant - Saturday 20 December 1766

A large Grampus Whale, measuring 58 Feet in Length, was a few Days ago cast on Shore a few

Miles to the Northward of Bamf (sic!), in Scotland.

Comment: Although a length of 58 feet and the stranding date (mid-December) not entirely ascertain the species, naming the cetacean 'a large grampus whale' (a commonly used synonym for sperm whale during the 18th century) provides sufficient proof.

1767

English record:

Newcastle Courant - Saturday 17 January 1767

Thursday se'ennight a large grampus whale was drove ashore in Birdlington Bay (sic!), measuring fifty eight feet in length.

Comment : Thursday se'ennight (17 January) = 8 January. Although a length of 58 feet and the stranding date (early January) not entirely ascertain the species, naming the cetacean 'a large grampus whale' (a commonly used synonym for sperm whale during the 18th century) provides sufficient proof.

Dutch record:

Leeds Intelligencer - Tuesday 24 November 1767

A few days ago, a female grampus whale, sixty feet long, was driven on shore at Sas van Ghent, in Zealand.

Comment: Grampus whale is indicative for a toothed whale. Unlikely, this cetacean was a female, given the size, but presumably a very freshly dead individual with its penis not yet extruded due to initial decomposition only.

1768

Two cases have been identified for this year

Case 1: Newcastle Chronicle - Saturday 30 January 1768

A few days ago a large grampus whale, fifty nine feet long, was cast ashore in Lynn deeps, with a Dutch harpoon iron struck in his back.

Comment: Season and size of the whale are indicative of a sperm whale, whilst "large grampus whale" provides a save identifica-

tion. Also, the Dutch harpoon iron is indicative of sperm whale.

Case 2: Caledonian Mercury - Wednesday 16 March 1768

We hear, that last night a whale meat.ilvic (?) wards of sixty feet, having been in pursuit off fishes, got into shallow water near Cramond, was caught.

Comment: The stranding took place the night between 15 and 16 March 1768 on Cramond Island. Only the reported length (60 feet) of the whale is provided on 16 March whilst proof of the species identity subsequently was given by the same newspaper on 21 March and 9 April, respectively, stating both name of the whale (*Catchelot*) and yield of spermaceti oil.

1775

Newcastle Courant - Saturday 9 December 1775

A few days ago, a large dead Grampus Whale was cast on shore near Bridlington Bay, which proved so very nauseous as to clear the coast of the fish, which were commonly there found at this season. Several boats and men were employed in hewing it to pieces and carrying it off.

Comment: "Large grampus" is considered a safe species ID for a sperm whale. Supportive is the season mentioned.

1778

Stamford Mercury - Thursday 1 October 1778
A Grampus (a fish of the whale kind, but lesser) was lately taken in Deeps near Boston in Lincolnshire, by his Majesty's cutter there stationed: It measured 54 feet in length, and 7 feet in depth.

Leeds Intelligencer - Tuesday 6 October 1778
Thursday se'nnight a party of pilots were sailing in the Boston Deeps (not far from that town) they discover'd a whale sleeping on the surface of the water; they instantly advanced to it, and tied the other end to the tail of the

boat, which awakening the whale, it instantly threw out such a quantity of water out of its blowhole or nostril, as nearly overset the boat; and striking out to sea, took the rope away with it; upon which the pilots made signals to the King's smacks (belonging to Boston) to come to their assistance, who instantly gave chase to it, fired their swivel guns, and wounded it mortally; the pilots and smack's then began the attack with cutlasses and boat-hooks, and after a smart recontre, killed it; they then towed it into Boston, and on Saturday se'nnight was cut in pieces, and boiled for oil, which with the bone, is worth 200 l.
 Comment: The kill took place late September 1778 in a tidal channel near Boston. The species ID rests on the name 'grampus whale', as well as the reported length of 54 feet and the description of the whale's behaviour which also similarly has been described for stranded sperm whales along the Danish Wadden Sea coast thought to be dead (Tougaard & Kinze 1998).

1781

Newcastle Chronicle - Saturday 16 June 1781
A few days ago, a large whale of the grampus kind came on shore at Easington, in the county of Durham; its length 18 yards, and breadth of the tail 7 yards: It became the property of Mr. Lambton, as Lord of the Manor, and was purchased by Mr. Wm Greene, oil merchant, in this place.
 Comment: The stranding took place outside the prime stranding season mid-June 1781 at Easington Grampus kind; 18 yards = 54 feet pro-

vides a safe species ID.

1792

Norwegian record

Fabers Fyenske Avertissements-Tidende eller de til Forsendelse med Posten Kongelig allene privilegerede Fyens Stifts almindelige Adresse-Contoirs Efterretninger 31 December 1792
En Bonde fra Grevskabet Jarlsberg har fanget en Hvalfisk, der var 54 og en halv fod lang, og 28 Fod tyk. Neppe 6 Heste kunde trække Fiskens Hoved, og den havde 60 Skpd [= Skippund] Spek. A peasant of Jarlsberg county has caught a Whale fish, being 54 and a half Feet long, and 28 Feet thick. Barely 6 horses could drag the head of the Fish, and it had 60 shippounds [Danish-Norwegian unit 1 skpd = 158.72 kg] of blubber.
 Comment: The sheer weight of the head is indicative for the species and is supported both by the reported length and the stranding date. The blubber weight of amounts to 9,523.2 kg which must be considered a fairly good yield as compared the commercial figure of 13.94 tonnes of a similar sized individual from Japan (Omura 1950).

1795

Stamford Mercury - Friday 24 July 1795
Friday se'nnight, a young Spermaceti whale was driven ashore near Redcar, in Yorkshire: It measured fifty feet, and was claimed by Lord Dundas.
 Comment: The stranding date has be specified to 17 July.