

NOTE ON A GRAY WHALE FOUND IN THE ISE BAY ON THE PACIFIC COAST OF JAPAN

MASAMI FURUTA

Toba Aquarium, Toba, Mie-ken, 517 Japan

A gray whale, *Eschrichtius robustus* (Lilljeborg, 1861), was sighted at 1245 hour of 27 March 1982 within a few hundreds meters from the shore of the Mikimoto Pearl Island at Toba (34°28'N, 136°53'E; water depth 8 to 15 m), which locates in the Shima Archipelago near the entrance of the Ise Bay on the Pacific coast of central Japan (Fig. 1). The species was identified by the shape of rostrum (Fig. 2) and about 10 dorsal humps (Fig. 3). The body length was estimated at about 12 m. Most of its body surface was covered by barnacles and white/yellow falling skin presumably covering healing scars (Figs 2 and 3). Remaining portion of the body was dark gray. Several parallel scars present on the right side of head (Fig. 2) were presumably caused by screw propeller of a small boat. This whale was swimming toward the Ise Bay, and disappeared at 1700 hour (27 March).

On 12 April, 16 days after the first sighting, the same whale (identified by the scars) was sighted in a shallow water in the Ise Bay off Tsu City. After this date, the whale was sighted frequently by the flights of the press and television companies, and some shipboard observation was done. All the confirmed records being in the same area, it was suspected that the whale had settled down the place. The last sighting was recorded by the Chunichi Press on 31 May at the same location, and the whale was considered to have left the Ise Bay thereafter. The minimum duration of the stay in the coast was 64 days since 27 March.

Since the sea was shallow (7 to 15 m), the whale's movement off the coast of Tsu city was traced easily by the cloud of mud along its passage. The interval of dives was 5 to 6 seconds (short dives) or 3 to 4 minutes (long dives). The blow was heart shaped. The spyhopping posture was once observed.

Omura (1974) indicated in his review that there was a low level of constant catch of the gray whale by the Japanese net-whaling along the Pacific coast till the end of the last century. However, the gray whale records have been extremely limited in the Pacific coast in recent years (Nishiwaki and Kasuya, 1970). The present record is the third one known to science off the Pacific coast after the start of complete protection in 1937.

I wish to express my thanks to all the people who helped me in collecting the information and to Dr T. Kasuya for his critical reading of the draft.

REFERENCES

- NISHIWAKI, M. and T. KASUYA, 1970. Recent record of gray whale in the adjacent waters of Japan and a consideration on its migration. *Sci. Rep. Whales Res. Inst.*, 22: 29-37.
- OMURA, H., 1974. Possible migration route of the gray whale on the coast of Japan. *Sci. Rep. Whales Res. Inst.*, 26: 1-14.

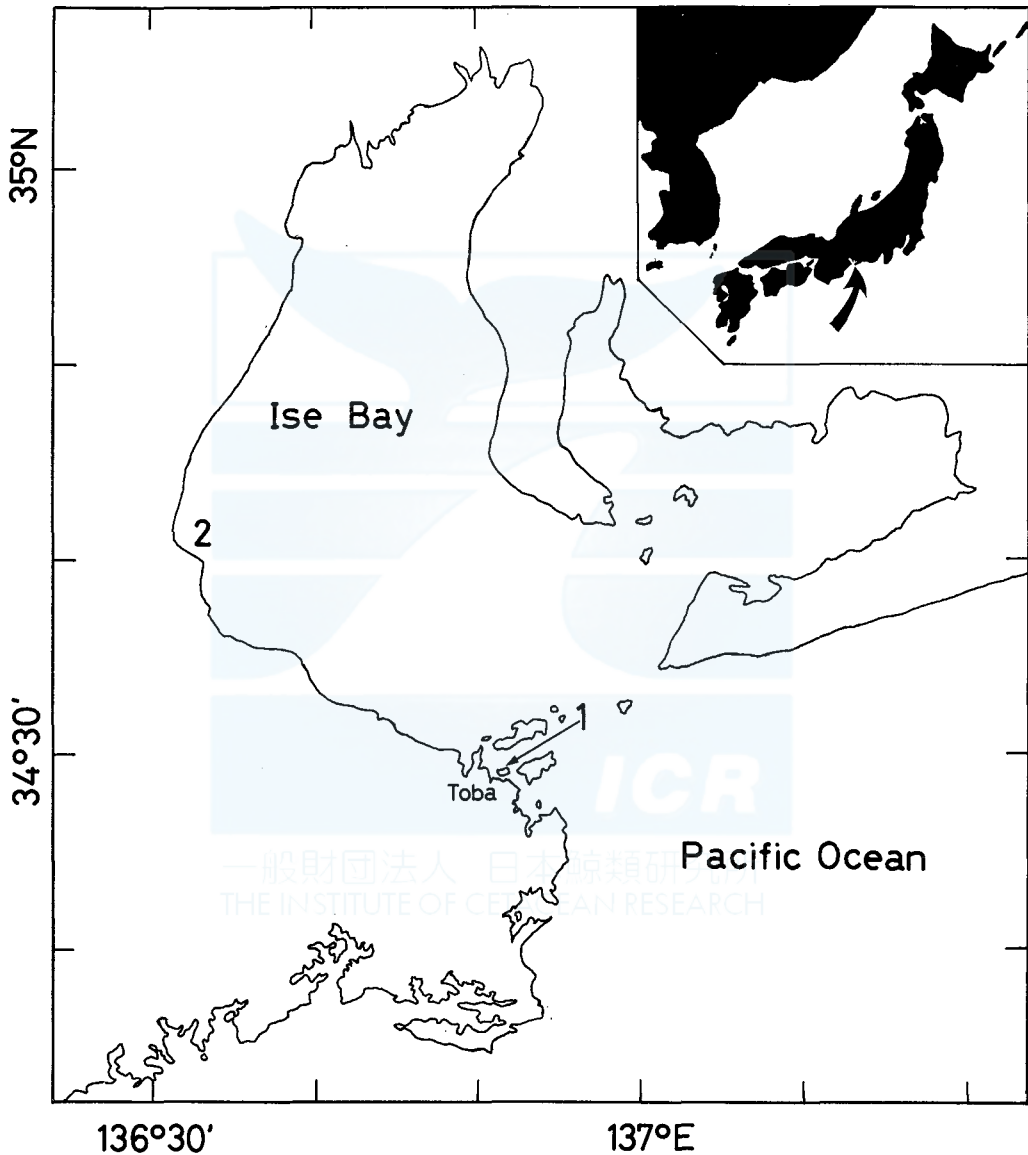


Fig. 1. Map of Toba and the Ise Bay region. 1: Mikimoto Pearl Island where the whale was first sighted; 2: off Tsu city where the whale stayed for minimum of 45 days.



Fig. 2. Right side of head region of the whale, off Tsu City.

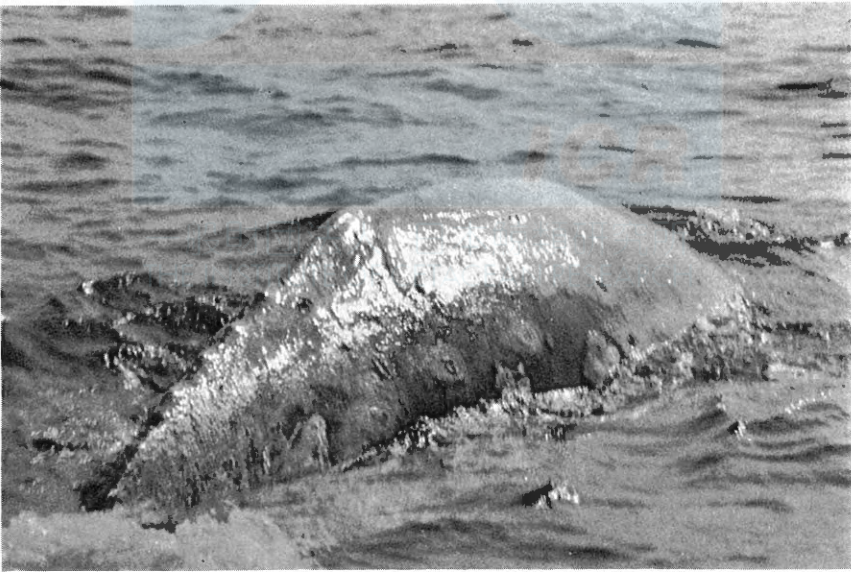


Fig. 3. Dorsal humps of the whale, off Tsu City.