

Plastic debris in the stomach of a Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) stranded on the french channel coast.



Kerleau, F.¹

¹Groupe d'Etude des Cétacés du Cotentin (GECC), 50130 Cherbourg-Octeville, France
Correspondance : f.kerleau@wanadoo.fr

INTRODUCTION

The impact of floating debris on marine fauna has been documented in mammals, birds, turtles, fishes and a few invertebrates. Plastic matter constitutes the vast majority of this debris and its ingestion by marine animals can result in death. Many cetacean species, particularly toothed whales (odontocetes), are victims of such debris.



The Minke whale stranded on the beach of Lestre (50, France)

MATERIAL and METHODS

On 6 April 2002, a dead juvenile female Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) was washed ashore on a Normandy beach (French Channel coast). The size (3,97 m long) of this whale suggested that it had probably not been weaned.

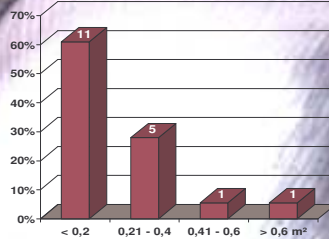


The stomach full up with plastic debris

An analysis of the whale's stomach contents revealed that this organ was completely obstructed by a compact mass of plastic debris. A viscous black fluid covered the debris and the gastric mucous membrane was necrosed. No trace of animal prey was observed.



Size of the 18 plastic's pieces

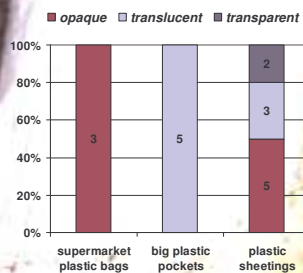


RESULTS

After cleaning and drying the debris, we counted 18 pieces of plastic representing a total surface area of 3.95 m², along with a few smaller fragments of plastic.

We found three supermarket plastic bags (16.7%), five big plastic pockets (27.8%) and ten pieces of plastic sheeting (55.5%) in the stomach.

The average surface area was 0.22 m² and the area of the largest piece was 0.66 m². Of the 18 pieces of plastic, 16 were opaque or translucent (88.9%) and only two were transparent (11%).



CONCLUSION

In France, the 10 cases described since 1984 of marine debris ingestion in cetaceans involved only toothed whales (odontocetes) stranded on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts (data CRMM, National stranding network). This discovery represents the first reported case of the ingestion of plastic debris by baleen whales (mysticetes) in France.

Acknowledgements – I gratefully acknowledge the terrestrial and marine authorities, and all the informants for their contribution in the stranding network of GECC in Normandy. I also thank G. Mauger, C. Holley and T. Majal for their participation during the necropsy.

I am very grateful to M. Mathieu, J.P. Robin and M.P. Chichery (University of Caen), B. Dubois and J.F. De Pierrepont for their analysis. I wish to thank L. Acharya, J. Duval and D. Marchand for improving the english of this poster.