

## NEW RECORD OF MOTHER-CALF PAIR OF SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE, *EUBALAENA AUSTRALIS*, OFF THE PERUVIAN COAST

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On 26 August 2003 a new record of southern right whale *Eubalaena australis* was obtained for the Peruvian coast, off San Fernando Bay (15°08'S, 75°21'W), 25km north of San Juan de Marcona, Department of Ica (Figure 1). It represents a third confirmed sighting of *E. australis* for Peru after one sighting in November 1987 and another in September 1996 (Van Waerebeek *et al.*, 1992; 1998). Based on behavioral cues and relative body sizes, the whales were a mother-calf pair. The mother measured an estimated 15m in length and the calf was less than half the length of the adult. This sighting, by naked eye from shore, some 100m away from the individuals from 14:00 until 14:30 hrs is the second case of a mother-calf pair of

southern right whales documented in Peruvian waters. The other previous record in September 1996 was made by Van Waerebeek *et al.* (1998). The sighting documented in this note is the northernmost confirmed record of this species in the Southeast Pacific ocean. The whales in San Fernando Bay were sighted in a shallow water zone locally known as *pasadizo*. Most sightings of southern right whale with calves, registered on the Chilean coast were in shallow waters, with depths ranging from 5-30 meters (Aguayo *et al.*, 1992). San Fernando Bay is generally quiet, and visited only by shellfish fishermen because it is difficult to reach, in spite of its relative proximity to San Juan de Marcona Port.

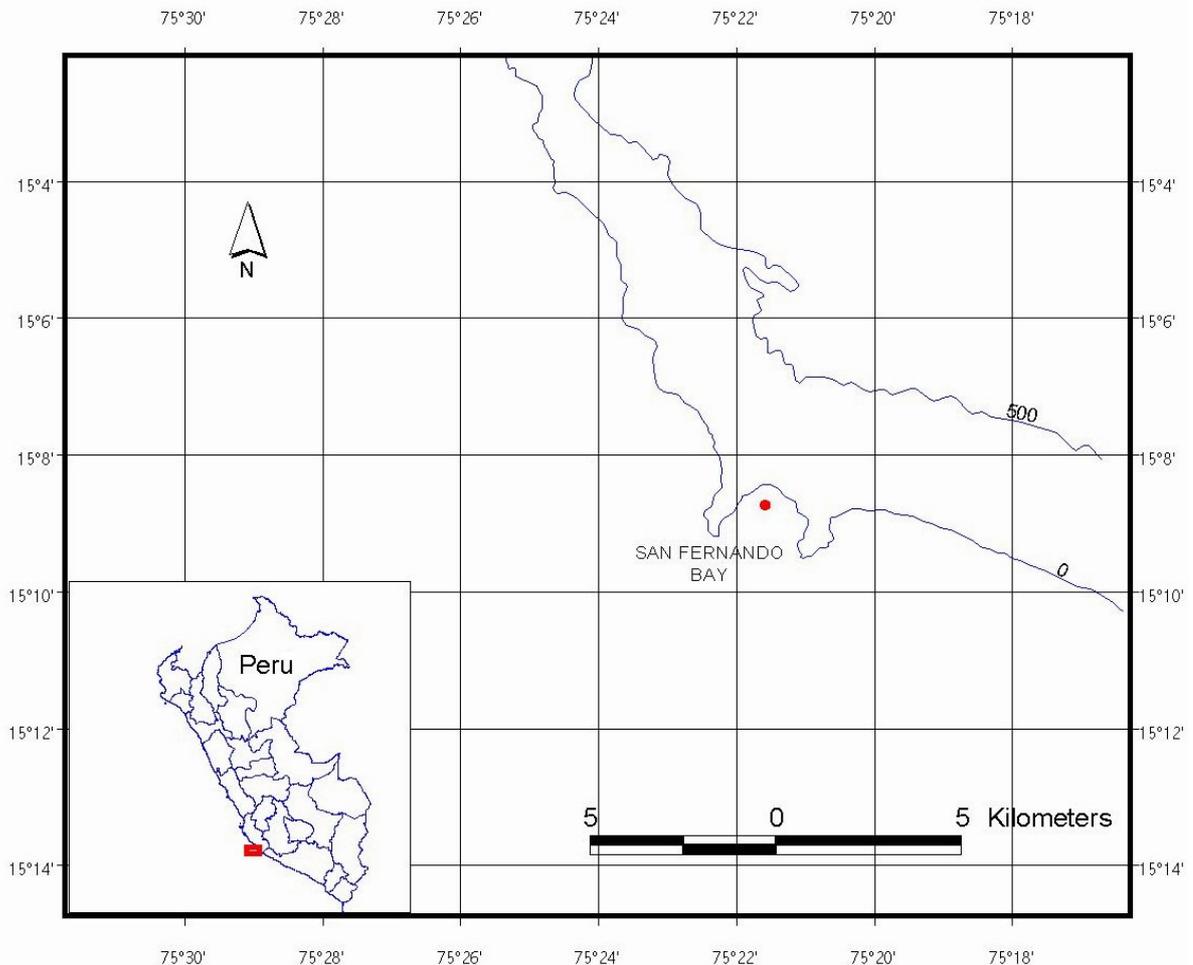


Figure 1. Sighting area of southern right whales.

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The whales were near the surface at all times, maintaining the same position without moving any significant distance, with slow movements, and were observed for at least 30 minutes next to each other. Periodically the calf was seen to position itself opposite or at a right angle to the mother, presumably in attempts to suckle. During our observation period the mother did not seem to respond to this action. The back and head of the adult whale frequently became visible. Roughly 80-100m from the whales, artisanal fishermen were diving and gathering shellfish from a small boat. Although the fishermen did not pay attention to the whales and hence did not actively harass them, their presence and activity appeared to disturb the whales. Shell fishermen of San Juan de Marcona informed that a large right whale had arrived alone at San Fernando Bay in early July (S. Quispe and P. Llerena, pers. comm.). Assuming this was the same adult, it is probable that parturition occurred in July or August. In the second half of October, one month after the sighting reported here, one of the authors (MR) visited San Fernando Bay again but did not sight whales, but was told by local fishermen that whales were seen leaving San Fernando around the last days of September.

Documentation of 19<sup>th</sup> century whaling, indicated whaling grounds for right whales off northern Peru between 5°-15°S and 80°-85°W (Maury, 1851). If this information was accurate, feeding and/or breeding grounds of southern Right Whales may have existed in Peruvian waters before the beginning of the whaling period (Van Waerebeek *et al.*, 1998). This present sighting may indicate that the end of whaling activity, and the full protection of *E. australis* are allowing the populations to recover and reclaim ancient breeding grounds in the South Pacific and South Atlantic Oceans (Mermoz, 1980; Aguayo *et al.*, 1992; Canto *et al.*, 1992; Van Waerebeek *et al.*, 1992, 1998; Lodi *et al.*, 1996; Greig *et al.*, 2001; Santos *et al.*, 2001; Patenaude, 2003).

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