

FIRST RECORD OF THE DWARF SPERM WHALE (*KOGIA SIMA*) IN CARIBBEAN WATERS OF COSTA RICA¹

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Here I report the first record of the dwarf sperm whale for the Caribbean of Costa Rica, based on a sighting supported by photographic documentation. The sighting, made from a local boat as part of a survey undertaken to monitor coastal cetaceans in the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Reserve, occurred on 6 June 2006 at 9°39'N, 82°34'W, 6.1km east from Punta Mona, in 200m depth. One animal, presumably an adult, was observed motionless for four minutes at the surface (Fig. 1A). The animal performed three shallow dives before performing a long dive. During this time, I was able to observe the whale's dorsum, dorsal fin and its head as its snout was raised to breathe. Species identification was based on shape of the head (squarish head typical of *Kogia* spp.), and the shape of the dorsal fin. The latter allowed me to differentiate the specimen from the pygmy sperm whale (*K. breviceps*, de Blainville 1838) (Fig.1B).

The available information on the distribution of *K. sima* in the Caribbean shows a gap along Central America from Belize to Panama, mostly due to a lack of survey effort in deep waters (Cardona-Maldonado and Mignucci-Giannoni 1999, Ward *et al.* 2001). This new distribution record is a step forward in the species' baseline knowledge for the Wider Caribbean, which in turn might assist in future marine management decisions.

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Figure 1. Photographs of a dwarf sperm whale (*K. sima*) sighted on 6 June 2006 in Caribbean waters of southern Costa Rica, showing the distinctive dorsal fin.

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References

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