



First stranding record of a Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) on the island of Barbuda, Eastern Caribbean

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Antigua and Barbuda is a twin-island country in the Lesser Antilles lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Beaked whales (Family Ziphiidae) are known to occur in the Caribbean (Heyning, 1989; Mignucci-Giannoni, 1989; 1996; Rosario-Delestre *et al.*, 1999), but records are scarce. Among the family, Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) is the most commonly stranded ziphiid worldwide (Allen *et al.*, 2012; Bachara and Norman, 2013; Wojtek Bachara, unpublished database, accessed 30 December 2015). Here we present the first stranding record of this species on the island of Barbuda, in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

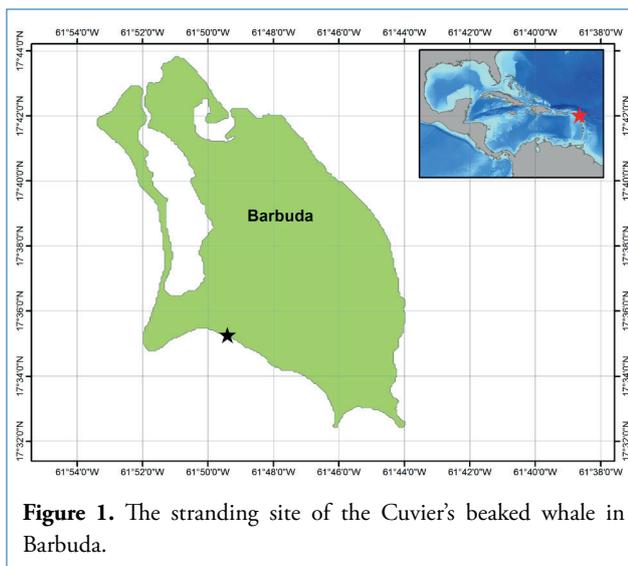


Figure 1. The stranding site of the Cuvier's beaked whale in Barbuda.

On Wednesday 9 April 2014, a medium-sized whale live-stranded between Palmetto and River Beach, Barbuda (approx. 17°37'N 61°49'W) (Fig. 1). Several attempts were made by local residents to push the whale back to the sea, but it returned to the beach each time. Photographs of the stranding (Fig. 2) were uploaded to social networks and then one of the authors (MWG) coordinated efforts with local fisheries officers to document the case. The carcass was lying in the surf zone and was examined by MWG on Friday 11 April 2014 (Fig. 3). Total length was estimated at about 5-6 m. At the time of examination, the carcass was in condition code 3 (according to criteria in Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005). The whale was identified by one of us (WB) as a subadult or adult female Cuvier's beaked whale based on the characteristic features and profile of the animal's head, including a smoothly-sloping forehead, stubby, poorly-defined beak, and a mouth-line that was curved along most of its length with an upturn at the rear and absence of erupted teeth in the lower jaw (based on Heyning, 1989). During examination, an unidentified large shark, whose length was estimated at 3-4 m, was seen in the area and had already taken pieces of flesh from the whale. No detailed necropsy was conducted and no samples were collected because of logistical constraints and the moderate decomposition state of the animal, thus the cause of death could not be determined.

Cuvier's beaked whales occupy all temperate, subtropical, and tropical waters of the globe. At times, they may even venture into sub-polar and even polar waters. They have been documented extensively throughout the Caribbean, particularly from strandings in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Erdman, 1961; 1962; 1970; Varona, 1964; Van



Figure 2. A female Cuvier's beaked whale stranded alive in Barbuda Island on 9 April 2014. Photo: Samantha Harris



Figure 3. Carcass of female Cuvier's beaked whale on 11 April 2014. Photo: Martha Watkins Gilkes

Bree and Kristensen, 1974; Mignucci-Giannoni, 1989; 1996; Debrot and Barros, 1994; Allen *et al.*, 2012; Bachara and Norman, 2013). This is the first stranding record of the species in Antigua and Barbuda and highlights the importance of future efforts to organize rapid and thorough stranding response and monitoring, including necropsies in this country as it exists in the rest of the Caribbean (IWC, 2011).

Acknowledgments

Samantha Harris and the Antigua and Barbuda Whale and Dolphin Network uploaded photographs of the release attempt to social networks. Information and logistical support was provided by Roy Morris of the Barbuda's Fisheries Office. Dr. Daniel Palacios kindly improved the manuscript. Vidal Martin confirmed identification of the whale. Dr. Aimilia Drougas and Dominik Nachtsheim kindly prepared a map.

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