

PLASTIC INGESTION IN A PYGMY SPERM WHALE, *KOGIA BREVICEPS*

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ABSTRACT

An adult female pygmy sperm whale, *Kogia breviceps*, (2.9 m body length) and a young male (1.8 m body length) thought to be her calf stranded alive on Galveston Island on 1 January 1984. Both animals were transported to a holding tank for observation and treatment. The female was extremely weak and died on the third day of captivity. Severe multiple mucosal ulcerations were found throughout all stomach chambers during necropsy. In contrast, the calf initially appeared to be thriving. He was able to swim unassisted and eventually began to make shallow dives. Force feeding was begun, and on the eighth and ninth days he voluntarily accepted squid placed in front of him. However, on the tenth day he suddenly weakened, lost interest in feeding, and died. On necropsy, the first two stomach compartments (forestomach and fundic chamber) were found to be completely occluded by a plastic garbage can liner, a bread wrapper, a corn chip bag, and two other pieces of plastic sheeting. The small third stomach chamber (connecting channel) prevented passage of the debris farther along the gastrointestinal tract. A severe inflammation within the abdominal cavity was also found which was diagnosed as the immediate cause of death and thought to be secondary to the gastric obstruction. The primary food item for this species is squid, and it is feasible that suspension of this debris in the water column may have been mistaken as prey by the inexperienced calf.