

## A REVIEW OF RECENT EXTRALIMITAL RECORDS OF THE BEARDED SEAL (*ERIGNATHUS BARBATUS*) ON THE WEST EUROPEAN CONTINENTAL COAST

In 1982 Ray *et al.* published a detailed review of extralimital records of the bearded seal on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean. Since that date more extralimital records have been reported, *e.g.*, Gosselin and Boily 1994. Here we report on four bearded seals found on the West European continental coast (northern Denmark to southern Spain) after 1982 (Fig. 1). Three fossil bones of bearded seals found on the bottom of the North Sea after 1982 must also be mentioned. They are tentatively dated as from the Eemian, the last interglacial in Europe (van Bree and Bosscha Erdbrink 1987).

A juvenile was found at Altura de Cabo Lastres, Provincia Asturias, Spain on 14 August 1983. The animal of unknown sex had a total length of between 140 and 150 cm (Avellá *et al.* 1993).

A female of 193 cm was captured in the harbor of Yerseke, Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, on 27 June 1988. The animal was brought to the Seal Rehabilitation and Research Centre at Pieterburen in the north of the Netherlands. The very lean seal recovered well but became infected with phocine distemper virus, which at that time caused the death of a large number of harbor seals, *Phoca vitulina*, and gray seals, *Halichoerus grypus*, along the coast of Western Europe. The bearded seal died on 12 August 1988 (van Bree and 't Hart 1989).

A specimen was found at Tréfontec in the Baie de Douarnenez, Département Finistère, France on 29 September 1994. The animal, a female of 49 kg, was brought to Océanopolis at Brest, where it died after a short time (Ridoux *et al.* 1996).

A previously unreported female of 195 cm was found dead at the southern border of the Baie de Somme, Département Somme, in France on 31 May 1998. Members of the society PICARDIE NATURE brought the body to Amiens, where it was dissected. The frozen head of the animal was sent to the Netherlands for confirmation of the species identity.

In France some confusion has been caused by a printing error in a booklet on seals by Duguay (1988). The first bearded seal known from that country was a young specimen found in the River Somme near Abbeville around 1810. The seal was brought to Paris where it lived some time in the local zoological garden. The remains of the animal are still in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris (Trouessart 1884). Instead of 1810, in the publication by Duguay (1988) 1910 is mentioned, so the impression is created that there were two bearded seals found near Abbeville, one about 1810 and the other in 1910.

Since the review by Ray *et al.* 1982, some bearded seals have also been found on the coasts of the United Kingdom and Ireland, *e.g.*, on the Shetland



Figure 1. Locations where bearded seals found on West European continental coast after 1982.

Islands.<sup>1</sup> These records will be published separately. Although not pertaining to the western coast of the European continent, attention must be drawn to the capture in a net of a bearded seal off Lobber Ort near Ostseebad Göhren on the Island of Rügen, Germany on 18 September 1991 (Harder 1992). The sex and its length are unknown because the animal, after being photographed, was set free. The occurrence of the species in the Baltic is rather extraordinary. In the past many arctic seals found on the coasts of the northern Atlantic Ocean were wrongly identified (van Bree 1997). Consequently they were considered much rarer than known at present. Bearded seals, however, seem to be an exception; they are still rarely encountered outside their normal distributional range.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication from Dr. John Harwood, Sea Mammal Research Unit, Gatty Marine Laboratory, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Fife KY16 8LB, Scotland, 3 September 1994.

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