



PHOTO: ERNEST CHUA

LOOK WHAT WASHED UP IN JURONG YESTERDAY The carcass of a sperm whale was found floating near Jurong Island yesterday morning. This is only the third sperm whale recorded in South-east Asian waters. The 10m-long carcass was transferred by boat to Tuas Marine Transfer Station, where five staff members from the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum took samples for analysis. **SINGAPORE•14**

SPERM WHALE ONLY THIRD RECORDED IN SOUTH-EAST ASIAN WATERS

Carcass of whale found near Jurong Island

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SINGAPORE – The carcass of a sperm whale was discovered yesterday morning floating near Jurong Island — the first time the species has been sighted in Singapore.

The person who had discovered it posted about it on social media. When Professor Peter Ng of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum learnt about it, he got his team to track it down and last night, the creature was brought in by a Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) boat.

The dead whale — only the third sperm whale recorded in Southeast Asian waters — is a notable discovery, and is of scientific and heritage value to Singapore, said Prof Ng. South-east Asian waters are not normally favoured by large whales because of shallow waters; they would normally

inhabit the Java Sea, South China Sea and the oceans, he noted.

The whale had multiple lesions on its body, suggesting it could have been hit by a large boat.

The animal would have been beautiful alive, Prof Ng remarked as the carcass arrived at Tuas Marine Transfer Station. The natural history museum engaged a lorry crane to pull it onto land — an exercise that lasted more than two hours — and staff and interns began collecting samples soon after.

“Anything that’s found floating in Singapore waters, the agencies will have to take care of it,” said Prof Ng. “In the water, the MPA has to worry about it because we don’t want boats crashing into it.

“The National Environment Agency has to be informed because, well, it’s a dead whale. So automatically we sought their help to find out where the

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So this is a notable discovery that (tells us), ‘Hey, the sperm whale is here.’ Maybe it’s in transit, it’s not very common, but they are here. For the island, it’s significant.”

Prof Peter Ng
OF THE LEE KONG
CHIAN NATURAL
HISTORY MUSEUM

whale is and what can be done.”

The carcass would either have floated out of Singapore waters or been removed from the water and incinerated. “But we didn’t want that to happen,” said Prof Ng.

When his team found that the rare find was over 10m long and freshly dead, “it’s even more important that we secure the whale for science and for Singapore”, he added.

Ideally, its skeleton would be put on display at the natural history mu-

seum “for generations to come” but, last night, Prof Ng said he was only focused on securing the carcass so tissue samples could be taken and its important parts such as muscles are preserved.

Over the next few days, the animal will be fussed over by scientists.

It is difficult to tell how long the process of removing its flesh and getting the skeleton out will take “because we’ve never done this before ... we’ll do our best”, Prof Ng said.