

WHALE OF A FIND IN S'PORE

Rare sight of whale's carcass has caused a stir among residents and researchers here



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An adult female sperm whale, 10.6m long and weighing between 8 and 10 tonnes, was found in Singapore waters for the first time. Sperm whales are the largest toothed whales and largest carnivorous animals on earth. Adult males can grow longer than 20m and weigh over 50 tonnes. The species is regarded by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as vulnerable to extinction. The mammal was found floating off Jurong Island last Friday. Mr Jalani Salleh, a worker in the oil industry, posted a video of his sighting on Facebook group Nostalgic Singapore on Friday morning. Singapore got its first and only complete large whale carcass in 1892. The 13m-long baleen whale was found beached in southern Malacca that year and its skeleton was

subsequently displayed in the old National Museum from 1907 to 1974. It was then presented as a gift to Malaysia's Muzium Negara and is now housed in the Maritime Museum on Labuan, off Sabah. Sothe Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum was very keen to recover the recent find for its collection. The carcass had a huge gash on its posterior half. After museum staff inspected it, divers from the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore secured it with ropes to the buoy tender vessel Panduan, which had to move slowly across the West Johor Strait to prevent disintegration of the specimen in the rough waters. When the carcass reached the Tuas Marine Transfer Station at about 9pm, the museum's mammals and birds curator, Mr Marcus Chua, and scientific officer Foo Maosheng started work on collecting tissue samples while it was still "fresh". Over the next few weeks, museum staff will collect tissues, examine gut contents and recover the skeleton for research and educational purposes. The skeleton of the "Singapore Whale" will eventually go on show at the museum. iam@yaohui.sg



(Above) An MPA diver preparing to go into the water last Friday afternoon to tie a rope around the whale's body before it is secured to the buoy tender vessel Panduan and towed across the West Johor Strait to Tuas Marine Transfer Station. (Right) On Monday, the fourth day after the sperm whale's carcass was found, part of the skeleton can be seen.



Museum conservator Kate Pocklington (left), 28, and mammals and birds curator Marcus Chua, 31, removing blubber from the carcass last Saturday.



(Clockwise from far left) Scientific officer Letchumi Mani, 25, shows the inside of part of the whale's stomach. Squid beaks, which cannot be digested, are found in the stomach. Sperm whales feed primarily on squids. Plastic trash found in the stomach. Plastic takes a long time to disintegrate and is often ingested by marine animals.