

Plastic cups found in the gut of sperm whale



Museum staff worked round the clock to preserve the skeleton of the sperm whale. It is now a major attraction in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. PHOTO: COURTESY OF IFFAH IESA

Details of dead sea mammal found off Jurong Island in 2015 are documented in a new book

Audrey Tan

Singapore's murky waters are an unexpected treasure trove of marine life, and the greatest proof of that now hangs at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

The skeleton of a 10.6m-long sperm whale takes pride of place there, and it is little wonder why.

It is the first sperm whale to be documented in the Republic.

Jubi Lee, as the whale is affectionately known, was found dead and floating off Jurong Island two years ago, when Singapore was having its golden jubilee celebrations.

Observations showed it had suffered a deep cut that may have been caused by a collision with a ship.

But the whale still had a story to tell. Researchers have documented findings based on their study of the sea mammal, to raise awareness of the importance of marine conservation. The story of how the giant sea creature was treated is being told in a new book launched recently by the museum.

"The 50th year of Independence, 2015, was marked by the return of the Singapore whale," wrote Professor Tommy Koh, chairman of the museum's advisory board, in the foreword.

"Unlike the whale of 1892, this whale was actually found in

Singapore's territorial waters."

He was referring to a 12.8m Indian fin whale that had been found in Malaysia. It was hung at the old National Museum in Stamford Road from 1907 to 1974 before it was given to Malaysia.

The 155-page book, titled *A Whale Out Of Water: The Salvage Of Singapore's Sperm Whale*, details how the whale was found, scientific discoveries arising from the carcass, and how museum staff worked round the clock to preserve its skeleton. One important discovery was what researchers found in the gut of the whale: Other than the remains of squids – a major part of its diet, they also found plastic cups.

"Mixed emotions were felt as we discovered both the astounding appetite of a whale and the devastation humans are causing to nature," wrote the authors, museum staff Iffah Iesa, 25, and Kate Pocklington, 30. "Among the thousands of indigestible squid beaks and eye lenses, was a collection of plastic wrappers and cups."

The book retails at the museum shop for \$26. But from now till the end of this month, it will be sold at a promotional price of \$16. Visitors can also view footage of the whale's dissection at the museum's new *Out Of The Water* exhibition.

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Museum scientists retrieving tissue from the sperm whale carcass for research on July 10, 2015, the day it was discovered. ST FILE PHOTO



Besides the remains of squids, a major part of the whale's diet, researchers also found plastic cups in the gut of the whale. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TAMMY LIM



The carcass of the sperm whale was found floating off Jurong Island two years ago. It is the first sperm whale to be documented in Singapore, and observations showed it had suffered a deep cut. PHOTO: COURTESY OF IFFAH IESA

SOBERING DISCOVERY

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IFFAH IESA AND KATE POCKLINGTON, authors of *A Whale Out Of Water: The Salvage Of Singapore's Sperm Whale*, on finding plastic cups in the gut of the whale.