

Project Update: July 2021

Achievements:

- Gathering new information on the poorly monitored local cetacean populations in order to understand the threats posed by interactions with fisheries.

Fully Achieved - The first half of the project focused on the project team familiarising themselves with the project landscape. In doing this they chanced upon a lot of information on cetaceans which has determined the areas to prioritise for streamlined action.

- Formation of a Cetacean Network and creating awareness on the significance of cetacean conservation to fishing and marine life

Fully Achieved - The project team focused on the formation of the cetacean network during the second quarter. Volunteers from coastal communities joined the network online platform and were responsible for reporting two major cetacean strandings during the period.

- To understand the attitude and perception of coastal communities and local government representatives toward the recurrent stranding of marine mammals in Ghana.

Fully Achieved - Following the stranding of over 60 melon headed dolphins close to Axim in April 2021, the project team added this objective to generate baseline information for subsequent activities.

Difficulties:

There were no major challenges in the third quarter of project implementation. Following the stranding at the western coast of Ghana, the team heightened the cetacean survey introducing new questionnaires and intensified awareness in the nearby community of Eloyim, Ellembelle District.

Outcomes:

The project team turned their attention to understanding the attitude and perception of coastal communities and local government representatives toward the recurrent stranding of marine mammals in Ghana. This was done using a semi-structured questionnaire which were administered to 60 individuals in six coastal communities. The results of the assessment are under analysis. Annex 1 is the sample questionnaire used for the analysis.

The cetacean network membership has increased to 22 dwellers along the coast of Ghana. For the first, a member of the network reported the life sighting of dolphins at sea as attached in Annex 2 of this document

Community involvement:

Until now, about 360 locals, mostly fishermen, have been engaged from the fish landing communities. The questionnaires administered brought on board officials of the regulatory agencies such as the Fisheries Commission and the Environmental

Protection Agency. An updated list of all participants will be available in the final report. During this quarter, our Facebook report reached a reduced audience compared to the previous quarter, but we have created a new alliance with a compatriot cetacean group in Ghana, who are ready to share ideas and support our activities.

Planned Activities:

In the next 3 months, the project team will continue with field visits twice each month to monitor for cetacean sightings. Visits will include awareness creation on the significance of cetacean conservation to the fishing industry and best fishing practices. We are preparing to hold our first Ghana cetacean network workshop in person in the final quarter barring any restrictions with the COVID 19 prevention guidelines.

Sharing results:

We reported the first sighting involving a humpback dolphin on our Facebook and YouTube channels and Ghana Marine and Freshwater Watch on Facebook. These same channels were used in reporting the major stranding at Axim. These reports reached over 3000 people on these platforms. We will continue using these platforms in addition to conference presentations and articles to share the project results. Below are links to the various reports. We are also looking forward to a poster presentation at the Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference in Florida, USA this December, if all travel requirement and logistics are secured.

<https://www.facebook.com/Ghana-Marine-and-Freshwater-Watch-105635707981870>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMSNNDIMZjOu7PeHHfjXlq>

<https://mohammedarmani.com/2021/04/06/on-the-mega-stranding-of-dolphins-close-to-axim-ghana/>

Team members:

Cosmos Acquah: Resides at Benyin in the Western Coast of Ghana. He continues to visit the coastal communities in the Western and Central regions of Ghana to interact with locals and encourage them to report sightings of cetaceans and any other rare species they identify at sea or on their coast. He was a major reporter on the melon headed stranded and was interviewed by local radio stations, educating locals on best ways to manage cetacean stranding.

Daniel Atsu: A fisherman and a cetacean conservationist from the Volta region of Ghana and stationed at the southern eastern coast of Ghana where he plies his trade. He usually engages colleague fishermen on the significance of cetaceans to the fishing and the need for fishermen to support cetacean conservation approaches. He has added eight fishermen to the Cetacean Network. He is responsible for the reporting of two stranding of humpback whales at Keta and Akplamanya coastal communities.

15. If the respondent said "Dead" in question 7										
What do you think may have caused the death of the animal?										
16. How do you consider a stranded marine mammal?										
Gods gift to feed the people		Divine sign from God		Potential health hazard			Big loss for biodiversity			
Other										
17. What happened to the carcass?										
Butchered into pieces			Returned to the water			Abandoned on the beach				
Handed over to fisheries commission personnel				Buried						
18. What did you personally do?										
Cut-off your own piece		Watched from afar		Tried to prevent other people cutting		Educate the people		Nothing		
19. If answer was cut-off, you're on piece, what did you do with the meat?										
eat		Sold		Shared for free			Other			
20. Have you ever received any form of awareness about protection of marine mammals?										
21. Would you like to know more about marine mammal (Species id, importance, how to safely return stranded alive animals to the water?										
Yes					No					
22. Why/What/When do you want to know if your answer is yes? If no, why?										

FISHERIES COMMISSION & EPA PERSONNELS

Code:		Location:	
Date:		Time:	
Dept.:			
1. For how long have you been working for the commission/Agency?			
Less than 5 years		Between 6 to 10 years	More than 10 years
2. Do you know what a marine mammal is?		Yes	No
3. Between the following animals, which ones are marine mammals?			
Fish	Dolphins	Shark	Ray
Whale	Crocodile	Lobster	Oyster
Sea Turtles			
4. What is the importance of marine mammals?			
5. Name the following marine mammals?			
6. Have you ever seen a marine mammal?		Yes	No
If yes, was it?	Alive	Dead	Both
7. Do you know the international conventions protecting marine mammals?			
8. Are you well equipped to investigate the cause of a stranding - sample collection, analysis and reporting?			
9. Are you well equipped to secure a stranding scene and prevent people from eating the animal?			
10. Is there any database on stranded marine mammals in Ghana?			
11. What can be done to improve management of stranding events in Ghana?			

ANNEX 2: Sample pictures from Third Quarter.



Fig 1: Short beaked dolphin sighting of shore by GCN member.



Fig 2: Administering questionnaire to locals on cetacean stranding.