

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

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5. BANDICOOT RAT SEIZING A SNAKE

At dusk on March 15, 1982 when a fresh-water snake, *Enhydryis enhydryis* Schneider, was moving at the water's edge of a roadside ditch at Kakdwip, 24-Parganas, West Bengal, a large Bandicoot rat, *Bandicota indica* (Bechstein) suddenly came out of a nearby bush and caught the snake. I focussed a 3-celled torch on the spot and saw that the Bandicoot was moving in to the bush holding the snake at about its anterior quarter of the body. I went close to the site but could neither locate the rat nor the snake.

It is believed that the rat might have seized the snake as food. Like all other rats the

Bandicoot rats are omnivorous and feed on household refuse, on grain and vegetables, and occasionally attack poultry (Prater 1965). Chakraborty and Chakraborty (1982) reported from the analysis of the gut contents that *B. indica* accepts a wide spectrum of animals, right from insects to amphibians. Behura (1958), however, reported a musk shrew attacking a snake.

Rats are, as a rule, known to be seized and swallowed by snakes. Perhaps this is the first occasion I have known of a Bandicoot rat seizing a snake.

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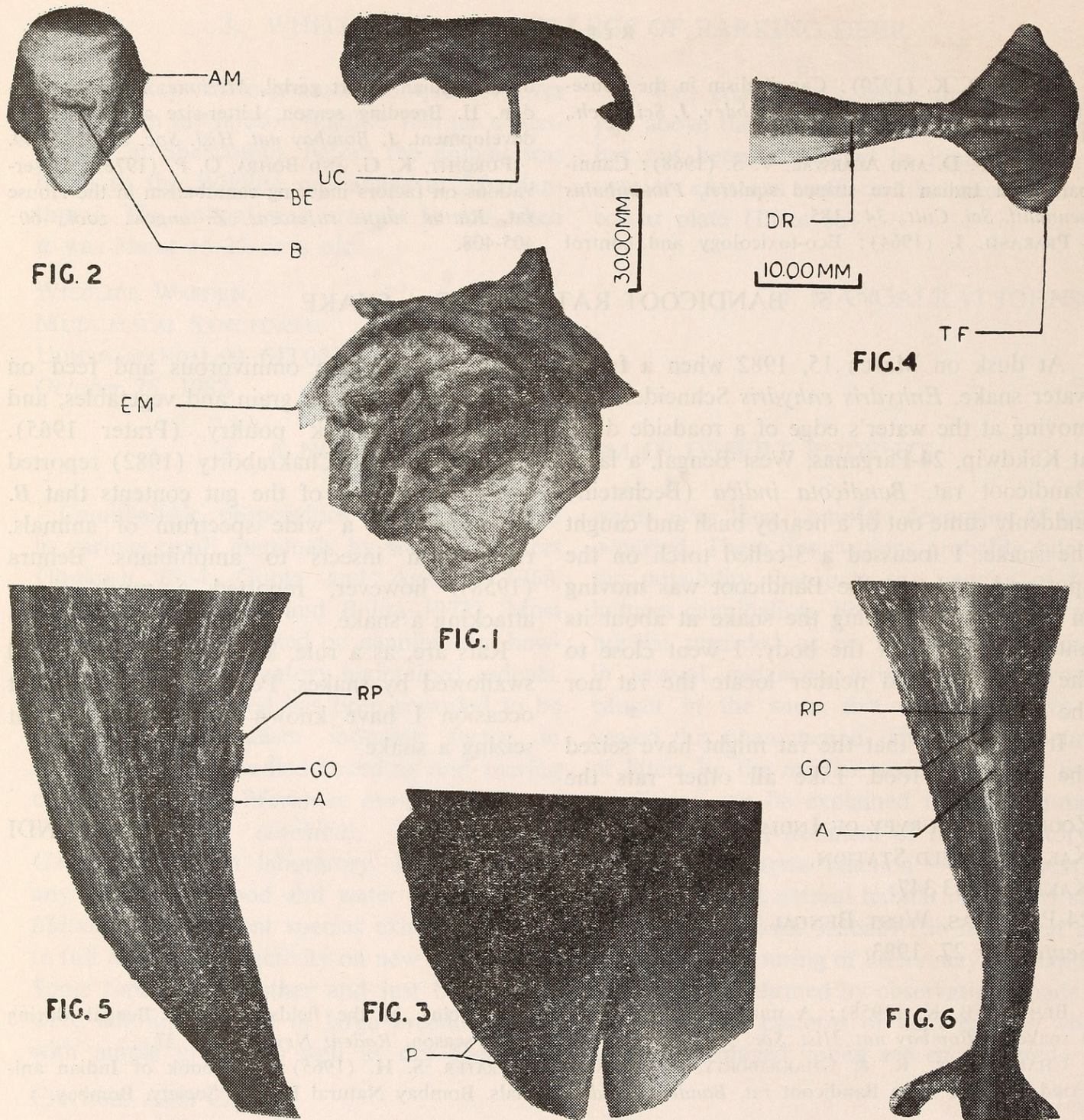
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6. RECORD OF A FOETUS OF THE FINLESS BLACK PORPOISE FROM GOA COAST

(With six text-figures)

On the morning of February 20, 1980, when collecting samples of fish on the beach of

Vasco-da-Gama (Goa), I saw some fishermen butchering a shark-like, smooth-bodied, black



Foetus of *Neophocaena phocaenoides*

Fig. 1. Entire foetus, lateral view; Fig. 2. Head, frontal view; Fig. 3. Head, lateral view (enlarged); Fig. 4. Tail with tail-fluke; Fig. 5. Inguinal region of belly, genital orifice covered by rod-like papilla; Fig. 6. Inguinal region of belly (rod-like papilla of genital orifice pushed aside).

Abbreviations: A— Anus; B — Blowhole; BAM — Bulging of Auditory Meatus; BE — Bulging of Eye; DR — Dorsal Ridge; EM — Extra-embryonic Membrane; GO — Genital Orifice; P — Papilla; RP — Rod-like Papilla; TF — Tail-fluke; UC — Umbilical Cord.

animal. It had no dorsal fin, and the tail flukes were horizontal. There was a pair of wing-like flippers at the position of pectoral fins, and the head was abruptly round. The pieces of flesh the fishermen were making had a thick layer of blubber beneath the skin. The viscera had the uterus containing a foetus. The gut was examined and a rare trematode was recovered which is being reported separately.

The foetus with the umbilical cord was enveloped in a transparent sac richly supplied with blood vessels and was clearly seen through it. Later, it was identified as **Neophocaena phocaenoides* (Cuvier) in the light of the observations made in the field as well as the foetus which has developed the main external features of the adult. The identification was confirmed by the Mammals Section, Z.S.I., Calcutta.

The Finless Black Porpoise or the Little Indian Porpoise, *Neophocaena phocaenoides* (Cuvier), occurs in the coastal waters of India. Pillay (1926) and Dawson (1959) recorded its occurrence off Trivandrum and Malpe respectively. Balan (1976) reported a female juvenile of this cetacean from Calicut. Dawson (1959) also reported four embryos of this animal. The present female foetus, whose account is given below, was recovered from its mother caught near the mouth of Zoari river off Vasco-da-Gama (Goa).

The creamy white foetus was completely enveloped in the extra-embryonic membrane profusely supplied with blood vessels when it was recovered from the uterus. The head is abruptly round and is roughly triangular in outline. The crescentic blowhole (nostril) is median and central in position. The head is

at right angles to the horizontal axis of the body. The snout is a bit drawn and appears beak-like. The eyes are beady and completely closed, and are situated at a distance behind the angle of the mouth. Behind the eye is the bulging of the auditory meatus but an external aperture is absent. There are four papillae on either side of the upper lip arranged in a line parallel to that of the mouth opening. The three anterior ones are close to each other while the fourth one is slightly distant. The head is marked off from the body by a slight narrowing of the intervening space suggestive of a neck. Near the beginning of the body there is a pair of pectoral flippers. The triangular dorsal fin is characteristically absent. Instead, the back of the body has a long depression in which minute scales are embedded in the skin. This is a characteristic feature of the foetus of the Finless Black porpoise. The tail tapers behind the dorsal depression and is streamlined. The tail flukes are horizontal and there is a notch in the middle. The tail flukes are stretched outwards and the posterior edges are semi-circular. The middle line of the tail is slightly ridged dorsally and ventrally. The ventral ridge extends up to the anus while the dorsal ridge extends up to the depression. The genital orifice is covered by a muscular rod-like flap inserted at the anterior corner of the orifice. The anus is situated behind the genital orifice. On either side of the reproductive opening there appears a very faint trace of a slit which is the seat for mammae.

The important body measurements are given below:

Length of body from anterior extremity of head to notch of tail fluke.....	100 mm
Width of body at the position of umbilical cord	24 mm
Length of head	28 mm
Width of head at level of eyes.....	19 mm

* *Neomeris* Gray, 1846 is junior homonym being preoccupied by *Neomeris* Lamouraux, 1816. Palmer (1899) rechristened it as *Neophocaena*. Also see Hershkovitz in *Smithsonian Inst. Bull.*: 246.

Blowhole across	5.5 mm
Mouth opening	7.5 mm
Angle of mouth to centre of eye.....	5 mm
Width of the base of insertion of flippers ..	6 mm
Length of flippers from centre of base of flippers	15 mm
Length of tail from anus to notch of tail fluke	38 mm
Distance from the anterior margin of the genital orifice to the attachment of the umbilical cord	14 mm
Tail fluke across	16.5 mm
Length of tail fluke from beginning to notch	11 mm
Length of umbilical cord	50 mm

Like the present foetus, Dawson's (1959) specimens measuring 93 mm and 98 mm have more or less beakless snout, and the mouth opening is almost vertical, but in the 155 mm long foetus the snout assumed roundish appearance and opening of the mouth became slanted. In Balan's (1976) female juvenile specimen measuring 669 mm long, the snout is comple-

tely round and the mouth opening is horizontal as in the adult animal. The colour of the dorsal surface is black while that of the ventral surface is pale. Thus, as the developing foetus grows in age, the colour of the body changes from creamy white to deep greyish black, and the somewhat beak-like appearance of the snout changes to beakless condition as in the adult.

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7. CATTLE EGRETS (*BUBULCUS IBIS*) FEEDING ON CICADAS ON TREES

On a recent trip to the Borivli National Park (18th April 1982) with Mr. Humayun Abdulali, we stopped to watch a number of cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) scattered over a large tree (*Garuga pinnata*) which was in fruit and which had many cicadas calling therefrom. As we watched, the egrets were seen to stalk

along a branch and when near enough, jab at the cicada after swaying the head two or three times from side to side presenting (as Drs. Salim Ali & Ripley have said in the HANDBOOK 1 p. 67) a comical appearance.

Egrets have been known to feed on blue-bottle flies from nectar-yielding flowers of



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